Stourbridge
CHRONICLE

Thursday, December 21, 2017 | Read by more than 56,000 people | Price when sold 70p

Pedestrian found dying in the street in early hours

ROAD DEATH – MAN ARRESTED

Report by Luke Bartlett

A MOTORIST has been arrested in connection with the death of a man found with multiple injuries in a Stourbridge street.

The victim, a man aged 37, was found in Amblecote High Street in the early hours of Saturday.

It is thought that he had been hit by a vehicle two hours before emergency services arrived at 5.25am. They tried to save the man but he died at the scene.

A 20-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving after handing himself in at a local police station.

Police say the man has been released pending further investigation.

The incident scene

Officers are seeking anyone with information on how the man came to be injured.

Collision

Sergeant Alan Wood, from West Midlands Police, said: "A number of people have spoken to me and my team but I am appealing to anyone who has not yet come forward and who was in the area at around 3.30am around the time of the collision to contact me.

"The man's family are being supported by specially-trained officers and our thoughts remain with them at this sad time."

Police had been looking for any CCTV camera coverage of the road and have urged anyone with information to come forward.

Resident Elanor Martin, who lived near the site of the incident, said: "Obviously it's upsetting, especially at this time of year."

The road closure cause long tailbacks towards Stourbridge and meant traffic was unable to pass from the High Street onto the town centre ring road.

Anyone with information is urged to contact the force's Collision Investigation Unit by emailing fl_collision_invest@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk – or they can leave information anonymously by calling Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

HUNDREDS OF SANTAS ON THE RUN FOR HOSPICE

Ho ho here we go – the Santa-clad joggers on the starting line at Mary Stevens Park for the Santa Jog, which has raised over £12,000

THEY donned their red suits and Santa hats – and they raised £12,000 for charity.

Hundreds of joggers braved the testing conditions of heavy rain and cold to take over Mary Stevens Park in a bid to raise funds for the Mary Stevens Hospice.

The charity dubbed the response to the Santa Jog as 'overwhelming' following its cancellation the week before as snow and ice hit the region.

A Mary Stevens Hospice spokesperson said: "Despite the enormous disappointment of last Sunday being cancelled due to the weather, we decided to try again and to see so, so many of you getting up early on a Sunday to come and have an amazing time with us really was just overwhelming.

"It was muddy, it was messy and it was absolutely amazing, and we honestly cannot tell you how grateful we are to everyone who came and to everyone who made today possible in such unique circumstances.

"So a huge thank you to Manor Vets for sponsoring the event, to Tommo and The Bhujhangy Drummers for providing our entertainment, to The Fitness Factory, Stourbridge, for getting us warmed up.

"And to our refreshments van, ice cream van, rides and stall holders, to our inspirational hospice volunteers and to our spectacular Santas for a truly special morning. Early indications are that you've raised at least £12,000 for hospice families this Christmas."

BUSINESS

Job fears grow as Toys R Us in crisis

FEARS are growing that struggling chain Toys R Us could collapse before Christmas, with the loss of more than 3,000 jobs, because of a dispute over its pension.

The UK arm of the toy giant needs agreement of its creditors at a crunch meeting today (Thursday) for a financial rescue deal called a company voluntary arrangement (CVA), that would see it shut 26 stores next year, axing 800 of its workers.

Toys R Us announced its restructuring plans earlier this month, proposing closure of the branch at St Andrews in Birmingham but retaining stores at Merry Hill and Oldbury.

DEVELOPMENT

Historic pub will be turned into a house

AN HISTORIC pub has been saved from demolition but houses will be still be built on the bowling green next to it.

The bulldozers were poised to flatten The Gate Inn, in Colley Gate, but it will now be converted into a house after Dudley Council planners said it was a 'heritage asset'. Plans to build six houses on the bowling green next to the pub on the corner of Colley Gate and Temple Tree Lane will go ahead.

COURT

Murder charge over death of woman, 26

A MAN will next month appear before a court charged with murdering a 26-year-old woman found dead in Kinver.

John Broadhurst, aged 39, of Blakeshall, Wolverley, will appear at Stafford Crown Court on January 9 in connection with the death of Natalie Andrews, who was found at a semi-detached property in Kenrose Mill a year ago.

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Stourbridge CHRONICLE

51-53 Queen Street
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Widow's moving tribute to victim

THE widow of Simon Johnson has told of the impact of his murder on her and their two children.

The 41-year-old was knifed to death by Damilola Johnson, no relation, during a bungled burglary.

The 19-year-old and a youth, aged 15 at the time but now 17, were stealing plants from a cannabis farm at the house in Cradley Road, Netherton, where the victim lived alone, on August 11 last year.

Roz Johnson, who separated from Simon in August 2015, said: "Those involved in Simon's death did not just take his life, they took the people that our daughters and I used to be too.

"The last 16 months without Si can not be described in a few words but the world is an emptier, lonelier and scarier place for us now."

Damilola Johnson was convicted of the murder by the Wolverhampton Crown Court jury while the youth, who cannot be named, was acquitted of murder but found guilty of manslaughter. They have both been remanded in custody until the New Year when they will be sentenced.

Mrs Johnson continued: "The unimaginable and horrifying act of murder has become a harrowing reality for us and the impact of his death has reached, and continues to reach, far and wide.

"Our daughters, aged 18 and 11, have had their dad taken from them in a sudden, unexpected, brutal and violent way without a chance for a goodbye – and that is something they, and I, will never recover from.

"Telling our daughters what had happened to their dad was the most difficult thing I have ever had to do and there have been countless difficult times since.

"We have been forced to deal with situations, experiences and emotions we didn't think possible and although we know Simon would be so proud of us for the dignity, strength and courage we have shown, it's no real comfort as he should be here, living his life with us."

She explained: "Simon and I had separated but we were still in the middle of raising our girls together and we had so many plans for the future as a family. He will be loved, missed and remembered always."

He was too trusting and paid with his life

FRIENDLY Simon Johnson ignored the advice of pals to stop inviting people he met in the pub back to his home – and paid with his life.

Now teenager Damilola Johnson is facing a life sentence for his murder.

The 19-year-old plunged a knife four times into the body of Mr Johnson after the 41-year-old was woken while he and a 15-year-old youth stole plants from a cannabis farm at the home of the victim.

Damilola Johnson was unanimously convicted of murder and burglary by the Wolverhampton Crown Court jury.

A younger defendant, now 17, was acquitted of murder but found guilty of manslaughter. He had admitted burglary. They are to be sentenced in the new year.

Mr Simon Denison QC, prosecuting, told Wolverhampton Crown Court: "The deceased was a naturally trusting man – too trusting, as it turned out."

The victim had lived alone in the three-bedroom semi in Cradley Road, Netherton, since 'amicably' parting with his wife and two children following the break down of their marriage in of 2015.

Danger

Window fitter Mr Johnson was discovered when colleague Max Richardson come to collect him for work around three hours after the murder took place on August 11 last year. The front door was locked but the living room window wide open with smears of blood around the frame.

Simon Johnson was a heavy cannabis user. After a chance meeting with Jack Griffin at the Waggon and Horses in Cradley Heath on August 5, he invited the teenager and his friends Clayton Pritchard and Abbey Hughes, all aged 18, to carry on drinking at the Cradley Road address. Griffin repaid the act of kindness by stealing the host's mobile phone and selling it for £180 the following day.

Mr Johnson made the mistake of showing Pritchard the cannabis growing in an upstairs room opposite his bedroom. The teenager wasted no time in telling his friends, triggering a sequence of events that led to murder.

Mr Richardson recalled: "Simon smoked a lot of weed and had shown me the grow. It was 15 or so plants under lamps in a tent. He said he was not responsible for it, just renting out the room. He said it helped to pay the bills."

Simon Johnson – died after being woken by thieves

Damilola Johnson – burglar who became a killer

Griffin and his two friends called at Mr Johnson's home again on the evening of August 10. Mr Johnson and the three teenagers spent the evening drinking, smoking cannabis, playing video games and watching TV until he decided to go to bed, allegedly locking the front door and telling the trio of visitors to leave through the unlocked living room window. They each secretly took a cannabis plant, and others had heard about the cannabis.

Only the two burglars know exactly what happened but the youth told Wolverhampton Crown Court that Damilola Johnson delivered the fatal blows after accidentally bumping into a bed and waking the older man.

Mr Johnson suffered a fractured eye socket in the vicious attack that followed as he tried to grab the intruder while the younger thief ran from the addres, where he had stolen credit cards during the early hours of August 11.

The fingerprints of both defendants were found on a bin bag full of cannabis discovered alongside Mr Johnson when his body was found on the upstairs landing by his workmate less than four hours later. CCTV film captured their escape after the killing.

A glove with traces of the DNA of Damilola Johnson and the blood of the victim was found discarded in a nearby street while a knife taken from the kitchen of the house – and thought to be the murder weapon – was discovered in the front garden of the house with the victim's blood on it.

Two more knives were later found behind a garden wall in nearby Durham Road where they had been hidden by the 17-year-old defendant as he left the scene.

Mr Johnson had been stabbed four times – one blow almost severed his aorta – after being woken by the thieves.

Each had a knife to strip the cannabis plants but one of these was used to end Simon Johnson's life.

Damilola Johnson, of no fixed address, and the 17-year-old were remanded in custody until January 12 when they will be sentenced by Judge James Burbidge QC who warned: "These are extremely serious offences and there will be significant sentences."

£12k fine as millionaire landlord in court again

A MILLIONAIRE landlord has been ordered to pay more than £12,000 after storing a huge shipping container on his land in Dudley without permission.

Latif ur Rehman has been fined just two months after he was made to pay £350,000 for converting four homes in Dudley into 17 cramped flats and bedsits without planning permission.

The landlord from Harborne, Birmingham, found himself back in court over the container and pleaded guilty to failing to comply with a single enforcement notice issued by Dudley Council.

Magistrates heard the authority took action following a complaint about the bright orange shipping container which was being used for storage for a shop on land owned by Rehman, 58, in Wolverhampton Street, Dudley.

Two planning applications submitted retrospectively, which sought permission to retain the shipping container on site, were refused by the council, the court heard.

Rehman ignored enforcement notices issued by the council to remove the container by September and was issued with a court summons.

He was fined £12,000 at Wolverhampton Magistrates Court and ordered to pay the council's legal costs of £620.48.

In October a judge was told how a 'squalid' property owned by the millionaire landlord was shut by police.

Service named best in country

WEST Midlands Ambulance Service has been named the best in the country at an awards ceremony.

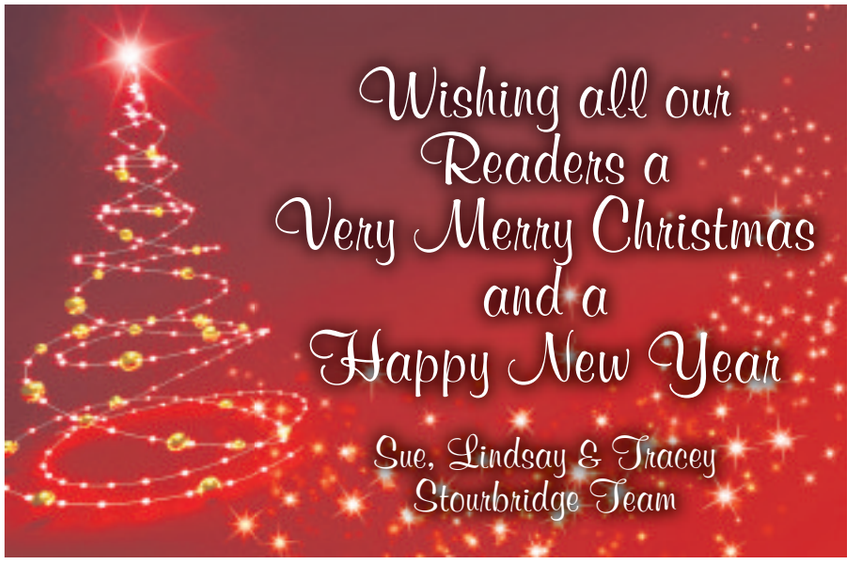
The organisation was crowned 'Ambulance Service of the Year' at the Health Business Awards. The award was presented to non-executive director Jacynth Ivey and paramedic Rob Moore.

Mr Moore said: "So much work goes in all over the trust to make things like this happen. It was an absolute honour to collect it on behalf of everyone alongside Jacynth."

The awards, at the Grange Hotel in London, recognise the contributions made each year by organisations and individuals that work inside and alongside the NHS. Winners in 22 categories were presented with their awards by Dr Phil Hammond.

Take a gander at panto

BRIERLEY Hill Music and Theatre Society returns to the stage in January with its latest pantomime production, Mother Goose. It is being performed in Brierley Hill Civic Hall on January 13, 14, 18, 19 and 20 at 7.15pm with matinees on January 13 and 20.



More than 200 caught by spy car at schools

MORE than 200 fines have been handed out to parents caught by a spy car introduced to crackdown on poor parking outside schools in Dudley.

Motorists have paid out more than £5,600 as 209 fines were dished out in just three months after the council's camera car starting looking for evidence of illegal parking.

Most fines were for those caught outside Christ Church Primary School in Coseley. A total of 39 notices were issued near the school in Church Road – nearly one if five of all the fines.

Another 34 were handed out on Hillcrest Road, Kates Hill, near St Joseph's Primary School.

The fines were given to those who parked on yellow zig-zag lines, which aim to create a safer area around school gates.

Motorists have been fined up to £70.

The spy car was also busy outside Blowers Green Primary Schoolin, Dudley, Netherton Primary School and Cotwall End Primary School on Cotwall End Road, Sedgley. There were 29, 18 and 17 fines issued at those schools respectively.

The vehicle was introduced at the start of the new term in September to improve pupils' safety. Council leader Patrick Harley said: "If people are parking illegally or dangerously outside schools then it's a safety issue. We've had 200-plus fines already so these measures are working."

Last-ditch deal to save care homes

FOUR Seasons, Britain's second-biggest care homes operator, with sites in the West Midlands, has struck a last-ditch deal with its major creditor, American hedge fund H/2 Capital Partners, that staves off the immediate threat of administration.

But the future of 17,000 elderly residents across 343 homes is still in doubt.

Locally the company operates Fernwood Court Care Home in Wolverhampton Road, Walsall; Ashbourne Care Home in Lightwood Road, Dudley; and Holbeche House in Wolverhampton Road, Kingswinford.

Four Seasons, owned by financier Guy Hands' private equity vehicle Terra Firma, is struggling under £525 million of debt.

Diamond Head back

STOURBRIDGE heavy metal veterans Diamond Head will return to play at Bilston's Robin 2 venue next year. The five-piece band, formed in 1976, went down so well recently that they will play the club again on October 6.

Pilot survived because he hit a farm bail

A MICROLIGHT pilot survived a horror crash near Stourbridge by landing on a large agricultural bale, a crash investigation has found.

The 43-year-old man lost control of the Pegasus Quantum before spiralling hundreds of feet to the ground in Clent, in the accident that happened in August 2016.

A report by the Air Accident Investigation Branch report can not explain how one of the wings folded before the crash. But it said the life of the pilot, who suffered serious injury, was saved by landing on a large agricultural bale.

Witness statements in the report describe the small aircraft spiralling down like a 'falling sycamore leaf'.

The pilot was left with little memory of what happened before the crash, which took place off Holy Cross Lane on August 15 last year. He received trauma care at the scene before being taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham with a serious injuries.

The report states: "It is not known what caused the accident but it appears that, following an event, the pilot lost control of the aircraft and was unable to recover it to normal flight before impacting the ground.

"A witness who saw the aircraft in the final moments reported that it had come down on top of a large farm bale, which had absorbed a lot of the impact energy."

The report continues: "During the impact with the ground he received serious leg injuries but no life threatening other injuries.

"The arrival on the large agricultural bale with its energy absorbing qualities was probably the main element that made this a survivable accident."

The report says that the pilot had flown to Otherton, near Penkridge, from Halfpenny Green, near Wolverhampton, in good conditions to carry out his annual flight test but because of a problem with engine heat he had decided to return to Halfpenny Green, near Wombourne.

However,during that flight the microlight suddenly began spiralling down to the ground out of control.

Holly being home is a family Christmas miracle

ONE little girl will be celebrating a very special Christmas at home with her family – after enduring 23 rounds of chemotherapy in a single year to overcome a rare form of cancer.

Holly Hutchings from Kingswinford was just three last Christmas Eve when she first developed symptoms of Wilm's Tumour, a rare childhood cancer that affects the kidneys.

She underwent a seven-hour operation to remove her right kidney, that had been engulfed by a 13cm tumour, and has had 27 weeks of chemotherapy. She is now cancer-free.

Four-year-old Holly will be enjoying Christmas at home with parents Sarah, 28 and Kyle, 31, as well as her little brother Joshua, one, all thanks to her mother's instinct that there were more to Holly's symptoms than medical staff first thought.

Sarah said: "This Christmas will be very emotional to us. Her symptoms became more serious on Christmas Eve, last year, and her little brother Joshua was rushed into hospital Christmas day too, so this year we will get to have our first proper Christmas altogether.

" The whole ordeal has made us cherish every precious moment we have. She has been the one that has kept us going, smiling and laughing the whole time. She is our little Christmas miracle."

Ordeal

Sarah recalled the ordeal they faced last Christmas: "We rushed Holly into A&E at around 5am on Christmas Eve when she woke with tenderness in her tummy and back.

"The sight of such a large amount of blood in her urine was so alarming that we rushed her to A&E where doctors told us she had a urine infection that had spread to her kidneys and reassured us it was completely normal. They sent us home with antibiotics but the symptoms never improved and it took until March to get a proper diagnosis."

Sarah noticed that Holly's symptoms were becoming worse as she suffered from a fever, loss of appetite and swollen glands.

"She lost so much weight her trousers wouldn't stay up but her tummy was very bloated, which didn't know at the time it was due to her kidneys working so hard.

"It was just mother's instinct that deep down I knew there was more to it."

At her wit's end Sarah demanded Holly have an ultrasound examination. The procedure in March revealed that Holly had a tumour in her right kidney that causing her left kidney to double in size to keep her alive.

Sarah said: "We were devastated when it was finally confirmed as Wilm's Tumour, but it had all so confirmed that I wasn't going mad.

Holly was given a treatment plan at Birmingham Children's hospital which meant a seven-hour operation to remove the tumour as well as her right kidney and 27-weeks of aggressive chemotherapy. Holly is now in remission but it will take a further six months for her immune system to fully recover.

Still smiling – Holly at home in Kingswinford with parents, Kyle and Sarah, and her brother, Joshua

NEWS IN BRIEF

Man in crashed car had cardiac arrest

PARAMEDICS were called to help save a man who had suffered cardiac arrest in Halesowen as his car crashed into a wall.

West Midlands Ambulance Service was called to Stourbridge Road in Halesowen at about 9.50am last Thursday and an air amulance was also sent to the scene.

An spokesman said: "Ambulance crews found a man who was in cardiac arrest. He had been rapidly extricated by firefighters after the car had collided with a bush, a post box and a wall." They managed to re-start his heart and he was taken on blue lights to hospital in Birmingham.

Fly-tipping fines have hit £120,000

FLY-TIPPERS in the West Midlands were fined a combined £120,000 in the past year – up from just £12,000 four years ago – according to new figures.

Local authorities across the region secured 295 fly-tipping prosecutions in 2016-17, up from just 67 in 2012-13.

Statistics released by the Government show a fly-tipping fines in the Midlands totalled £123,318 in 2016-17, a huge rise from 2012-13 when the combined fine was £12,954.

There were more than one million fly-tipping incidents in England in 2016-17, equivalent to 114 every hour.

Average house prices on the rise

THE price of the average home in Dudley has risen by £7,500 in the last year, as demand for property continues to overtake the supply.

Across the UK property prices have risen by 4.7 per cent to an average of £240,860, but this figures is hugely unbalanced by the price of properties in London and the South East.

In the West Midlands, on the border of the north/south property divide, the average is £186,351 and has risen 5.2 per cent. The latest figures from HM Land Registry show Dudley prices average £164,004, a rise of 4.8 per cent.

Toll road talk to launch 2018 history meetings

A HISTORY group will start the new year with a talk about a county's famous toll roads.

Julian Hunt will be giving an illustrated presentation, called Worcestershire's Turnpike Roads, to members of Stourbridge Historical Society on January 18 in the Wollaston Room at Stourbridge Town Hall at 7.30pm. For more information about the group's programme of talks see www.stourbridgehistoricalsociety.com website.

COUNTY NEWS

Warning by Severn Trent of bogus call

SEVERN Trent is warning its customers to be extra vigilant following reports of bogus phone callers claiming to be from the company threatening to cut off supplies.

Customers have received calls from a person who then threatened to stop water the following morning because of an unpaid bill. Elaine Taylor, of Severn Trent, said: "We often hear about people trying to access homes by saying they're from 'the water board' but this kind of phone call is unusual and obviously worrying."

For more information, go to stwater.co.uk/doorstep-password or call 08457 500 500.

Event to support disease survivors

SURVIVORS of meningitis are being invited to a charity day in March.

Meningitis Now is holding the event in Birmingham, but is inviting people from across the West Midlands.

It is designed to give people the opportunity to learn more about the different aspects of recovery and the after-effects of the disease, and provide practical skills and information.

The event will take place in Austin Court in central Birmingham on March 12.

Log onto www.meningitisnow.org/how-we-help/ways-we-can-help-you/about-our-services/support-events/rebuilding-futures-day-2018/ for details.

Plea for people to stay clear of A&E

HEALTH bosses at Russells Hall Hospital have urged people only to come to A&E if they have a serious condition as the pressure on the unit intensifies in the run-up to Christmas.

People have been warned they could face a long wait if they are not in urgent need of medial attention.

Chief nurse Siobhan Jordan said: "Our A&E is really busy at the moment, so we're asking that people support us to ensure we can treat the sickest patients as a priority."

Consultations due on £282m scheme

PUBLIC consultations on designs for a new £282m junction on the M42 near Birmingham will launch in the new year.

A new 2.4km dual carriageway link road will be created as part of a project to improve traffic flows at an important junction for the millions of people that travel to Birmingham International Airport every year as well as surrounding venues such as the NEC.

Centre tells customers about campaign

Steve Edis, Roy Lees and Dave Sims at Walsall Training Centre with donations

STAFF have been digging deep to help our Feed a Family This Christmas campaign.

Walsall Training Centre, which provides courses and assessments for gas, plumbing, electrical or construction trade sectors is the latest business to back the appeal.

They have collected dozens of items of food as well toiletries, clothing and toys, which will go to help those in need during the festive period.

Steve Edis, director of the training centre, said he was delighted to support the campaign.

"We try to support local food banks at this time of year, as we know there are a lot of families struggling at Christmas," he said.

Readers have donated festive food such as mince pies, chocolates and Christmas puddings, as well as basics including canned goods, long-life milk, fruit juice, pasta and rice. Non-food items such as toiletries, baby supplies, new socks and small presents have also come flooding in.

Since the campaign launched on November 4, we've had support from an array of organisations and schools across the region.

PTP Training has backed the appeal along with Healthwatch Wolverhampton, while Saddlers Shopping Centre in Walsall has come on board to collect donations.

Your generosity sees donations flooding in

YOUR incredible generosity in donating food to our Feed A Family This Christmas appeal will have a tangible effect for those in need across the Black Country.

Once again, thousands of items have flooded in to ensure people who, for whatever reason, rely on a food bank for a meal at Christmas time will not go without.

Our drop off points have been kept very busy during the four-week campaign thanks to the amazing kindness of you, our readers, and the wider community.

To highlight just how important food banks and keeping them stocked up can be, the Express & Star visited The Good Shepherd Ministry at Darlington Street Methodist Church in Wolverhampton to speak with people who have been given a lifeline by the volunteers who put themselves out to ensure others don't go without.

Helen Holloway, admin manager at the Good Shepherd, said: "The problem isn't going away and unfortunately food banks are more vital than ever."

The Good Shepherd Ministry also offers those who show the most enthusiasm for taking any opportunity they can get a place on their Service Volunteer Programme.

One such person who has taken on this responsibility is Heriberto Garcia Vazquez, 52, who travels via bus from Birmingham every day to help out. He started out as a food bank service user but is now a major part of the operation. He said: "These guys are like my family and I love it, I don't mind what they need me to do I will do it."

Maxine Price and Stephen Dale, who are engaged and live in Merridale, were both given a meal by volunteers during the Express & Star's visit to the Good Shepherd Ministry and had nothing but praise.

Maxine said: "The volunteers here are lovely, they are really here for people and make a difference.They have helped us in so many ways recently, not just with meals but with assistance that is crucial to our day to day lives."

Volunteer Heriberto Garcia Vazquez in the kitchen

Stephen Dale and Maxine Price at the ministry

Good Shepherd admin manager Helen Holloway

Kind pupils hand over their party

Pupils from Westcroft School at the E&S

SCHOOLCHILDREN have shown their caring nature by donating food left over from their Christmas party to our Feed A Family appeal.

Youngsters at Westcroft School in Wolverhampton were given the choice of keeping it for a later date or handing it over to help those less fortunate – they all voted to donate them. They have also been busy collecting hundreds of other donations of food, toiletries and toys, which they then delivered to the Express & Star head office.

These are being passed on to food banks and other good causes across the Black Country and Staffordshire.

Older pupils at the school, for students with complex learning needs, have been taught about some of the challenges people face in their lives in their citizenship and independent living skills lessons.

180 people are steered into driving jobs by firm

ALMOST 200 people have found driving jobs across the West Midlands, thanks to the growth of a recruitment provider, with hundreds more drivers to be placed into work in the next 12 months.

Dudley-based Workforce Staffing established its driving division a year ago and has found jobs for more than 180 people, working with more than 120 of the region's businesses.

The division, which employs seven staff at its branches in New Mill Street, Dudley, Birmingham and Redditch, has found jobs for workers in the Black Country, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

Joe Alekna, managing director of Workforce Staffing, said: "This has been an outstanding first year for our driving division and it is great that we have been able to place so many local people into local jobs.

Focus

"This is really only the beginning. We intend to double our current staff count over the next year and get 350 drivers out working across the region.

"Our focus is on connecting the right people with opportunities and our network of branches across the Midlands makes us ideally placed to fill vacancies – especially with the country's haulage industry facing a shortage of 45,000 drivers."

In 2015 the Workforce Group was voted as one of the UK's top 100 businesses to work for in the Sunday Times 100 Best Small Companies survey. It specialises in supplying staff for sectors including logistics, transport, professional services, office, food manufacturing and manufacturing.

Faster broadband speeds are coming

HOMES across Dudley borough are set to benefit from faster internet access as the Black Country's superfast broadband infrastructure is extended.

The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and the four Black Country local authorities are working together to extend superfast broadband infrastructure across the Black Country.

The initiative is part of a Government project aiming to extend the availability of high-speed fibre broadband to 98 percent of homes and businesses in Dudley in less than three years. Councillor Patrick Harley, leader of Dudley Council, said: "This initiative is long overdue."

To find out more visit www.blackcountrylep.co.uk/regional-growth/black-country-broadband website.

THE ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION STOURBRIDGE
We wish the people of Stourbridge a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR.
Why not come along and join us where a warm welcome awaits all serving and time served Royal Naval personel. We meet on the first Friday of the month at 19.45 at the Royal British Legion, Enville Street.
Our Mess room is situated upstairs and contains 12 H.M. Ship models, 679 framed cap tallies and loads more of Royal Navy artifacts.
We talk about all amusing nautical memories and more.
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Rugby club helps tackle knife crime

A RUGBY club is aiming to help tackle knife crime by getting more people into the sport.

Stourbridge Rugby Club is teaming up with organisation Opening Boundaries to hold the event in May. It follows a campaign, backed by the rugby club, called I Support Tackling Knife Crime.

Robin Edwards, chairman at Stourbridge Rugby, said, "The devastating effect of the increase in knife crime is being felt across UK society and locally we have felt the terrible sadness of lives being lost through this dreadful evil.

"We believe it is vital for our community to come together in support of organisations that can tackle this problem and collectively we aim to raise funds from rugby to invest in a safer future for us all.

"Working with the charity Opening Boundaries and West Midlands Police we are organising a charity rugby competition to be held at the end of our season and we will donate all proceeds to Birmingham Children's Hospital."

Farah Ahmed, project manager for Opening Boundaries, said: "We hope the day will raise money for a good cause while bringing people from the community together to say no to any form of violence.."

There is now an open invitation for individuals and teams to register their interest for a date in May yet to be announced. Contact info@openingboundaries.org for more.

Have your say on pharmacies

RESIDENTS are being invited to have their say on pharmacy services in Dudley.

The Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board is currently developing its Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment. It sets out services currently available, identifies any gaps in provision and makes recommendations on future development.

A consultation has been launched to hear what users think of the pharmaceutical services in their area. These include local chemist shops, pharmacy services in supermarkets, GP practices and online pharmacies.

The online survey is at dudley.gov.uk/community/initiatives/health-well-being/pharmaceutical-needs-assessment – until February 13.

Plan for 12 homes

TWELVE homes could be built on land between Lye and Stourbridge town centre under new plans lodged with Dudley Council.

The housing is proposed for Walton Drive, off Pedmore Road.

Train firm in £540m carriages deal

ENGINEERING giant Bombardier has signed on the dotted line to supply more than 300 new train carriages to West Midlands Trains – the UK's newest rail franchise – in a deal worth £540 million.

And all the vehicles will be made in the UK.

West Midlands Trains took over last weekend after winning the franchise from London Midland.

Its West Midlands Railway service operates around Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Shrewsbury and Telford. It also operates the London Northwestern Railway service between London and Liverpool.

The new fleet of 333 Aventra electric-powered train carriages is part of a promise from West Midlands Trains to increase frequency of services and reduce journey times. The new trains are expected to be delivered between 2020 and 2022, and will be built in Derby.

Bombardier has also signed an additional contract to provide the maintenance service teams to keep the vehicles reliable.

West Midlands Trains is a joint venture consisting of Abellio UK, East Japan Railway Company (JR East) and Mitsui.

Aventra electric-powered carriages

Scrabble is a success right from word go

Report by Marion Brennan

JANET Street-Porter once described Scrabble as more addictive than cocaine and champagne.

The colourful broadcaster is one of many celebrity fans of the board game, a list that also includes Keanu Reeves, Madonna, Jonathan Ross, Sharon Stone, Charles Saatchi and Her Majesty The Queen.

With an estimated 30,000 games starting around the world every hour, it is the word puzzle that refuses to go out of fashion. While other board games come and go, Scrabble forges ahead, steadily selling two-and-a-half million sets every year.

With the festive season in full swing, the 84-year-old game will surely feature on thousands of Christmas shopping lists. No doubt, in many households the box will be brought out Christmas Day evening or Boxing Day to exercise the brain cells and ward off snoozing in front of the TV.

Wits

Among its biggest fans are a group which meets every month at Blackheath Library in Rowley Regis. The mainly elderly members say it keeps their brains active and they enjoy the social aspect of club afternoons.

Sheila Brueton, aged 86, a retired financial director, said: "One of the reasons I love Scrabble is because it's so different from working with numbers as I did in my job, although I also love Rummikub, a numbers game.

"I find Scrabble keeps the brain ticking over and keeps us all young. And it's not competitive. "We don't play for the town clock, which is a phrase you will hear in whist."

There are two games going on at this particular meet-up, with one of the boards showing the word zags. Not normally seen without a preceding zig, it means a sharp change of direction and can be used on its own.

To the fairweather player, who might only have a go at Christmas or on a rainy afternoon, it's an impressive word. But not to the Blackheath Library Scrabble crew who have become experts at words with obscure meanings. They even know some excellent two-letter words, an extremely useful means to use up remaining tiles.

Barbara Betts, Carole Green, Sheila Brueton and Beryl Smith enjoy a game of scrabble at Blackheath Library

A chart is kept beside the board with a list of 123 little-known but acceptable two-letter words endorsed by their bible, the Chambers Scrabble Dictionary.

You don't need to know the meaning of handy fillers like bo and da, only that you can use them.

The aim of the game is to get the longest word you can, using all seven tiles, earning yourself a 50-point bonus. That rarely happens.

The highest single-play score on record is 392 points for caziques, the word for ancient Mexican princes, played during a match in Manchester in 1982 and still a world record.

Eleanor Hebbard, a 75-year-old retired administrator at Rowley College, once played a word that gave her a score of 144. So stunned was she that she took a photograph.

"Did you cheat?" asks Iris Wilkinson, 84, a former colleague. "Not that time," replies Eleanor. Humour is definitely a shared trait of these players.

Barbara Betts, 64, a former hospital clerk, says: "It's fun. We have a laugh – especially with the words we put down sometimes, which we couldn't repeat."

Blackheath, which meets every third Monday in the month, is one of 4,000 clubs worldwide – the board is printed in 29 languages – who regularly play.

In 2002, a number of phone texters lobbied the Association of British Scrabble Players, demanding that examples of text speak, such as BTW (by the way), be allowed but were turned down flat.

Regardless, the Blackheath players think the game is more popular than ever with young people – although possibly not with men. "You need patience – that's why not many husbands are interested in playing," added Eleanor

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tip to stay open all but three days

COUNCIL chiefs have issued a reminder to residents that the borough's tip will be open over the Christmas period.

The Birmingham Street site in Stourbridge will be open for people from Dudley borough every day apart from Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. People can recycle Christmas trees, packaging and unwanted electrical goods at the site.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare, cabinet member for environment, said: "Christmas and New Year is the time of year when a lot of excess waste is generated, which needs to be disposed of in a responsible way."

Call for action over derelict shops

A DERELICT row of shops in Stourbridge should be pulled down as they could pose a safety hazard and attract crime, a senior councillor has warned.

Wordsley councillor Paul Brothwood has called for action over the run-down shopping parade on Sandringham Place in Wordsley.

He said that Dudley Council should consider making a compulsory purchase order to take control of the eyesore site.

A petition calling for something to be done regarding the shops is set to be handed to the council next month.

Age challenge's £100k prize pot

ENTREPRENEURS across the West Midlands are being given the opportunity to win a slice of a £100,000 prize fund, designed to support development of technology that will help people in old age.

The first Centrica Active Ageing Challenge is looking for local start-ups with tech solutions that help meet the needs of an ageing society. Successful applicants will be asked to pitch to a team of industry experts in March. Applications should be submitted by February 5. Visit centrica.com/innovation/active-ageing website.

Concert will 100 years since end of the war

A SPECIAL concert in Dudley will mark 100 years since the end of the First World War next year.

The 1918 Memorial Concert is on Saturday, March 24, at 7.30pm, in aid of the Mayor of Dudley's Appeal Fund at Dudley Town Hall. The 70-strong Restoration Chorus and Stourbridge Chamber Orchestra will be performing with soprano Louise Maguire.

Tickets cost £12 from (01384)812812 or online boroughhalls.co.uk website.

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Banks – not wine bars but reason to whine on

A FEW years ago, NatWest bank had an advertising slogan which was, if nothing else, repetitive.

It seemed that every time you switched the TV on there was some customer groaning "my bank's now a trendy wine bar." The message was clear. Unlike other banks, NatWest realised that to serve customers you actually had to have a network of branches they can go to.

How times have changed. NatWest has just announced the closure of 197 branches, saying that more people are turning to internet banking, with the number of people calling into branches falling by 40 per cent since 2014. Maybe so, but I guess if you keep closing branches – and cutting hours – then you are bound to see fewer people calling into them.

The company suggests that people may prefer to use a "banking app" instead. Now I don't really know what a banking app is, but I'm fairly certain I wouldn't prefer to use it. What happens if somebody nicks your dog and bone? How many passwords are we expected to remember?

I can see why banks want more people to move online. The latest closure programme will see staff numbers cut by 680, and think of all the money saved on rent, rates and utility bills. But what's in it for the customer? The very thought of having my bank account at the mercy of the hackers brings me out in a cold sweat. The idea that I would have my life savings in an account protected only by a password I will struggle to remember seems utterly ridiculous, even if the interest rate is half a per cent higher.

Of course, given the state of the licensed trade, it is probably unlikely that any of the latest NatWest branches will become trendy wine bars.

Perhaps there should be a new advertising campaign. "My bank's boarded up and covered in graffiti."

❒❒❒

IN case you hadn't noticed we had a bit of snow last week. I know it took a few people by surprise, but these things tend to happen in December.

Now I don't want to go all Four Yorkshiremen on you, but I live on the top of a hill and drove 25 miles to work through what was supposed to be the coldest place in the country. It really isn't that hard; just pack a shovel, broom, and extra food, set out a bit earlier and take a different route. Anyone can do it.

It's funny how one of the things which seems to bring out the snowflakes is, well, a few snowflakes.

Technical crooks don't know how to use a hacksaw

Prince Edward – chose strange outfit for a formal photograph at his home

Pope Francis wants to drop 'lead us not into temptation' from the Lord's Prayer

Michael Gove – says leaving the EU might improve animal-welfare standards

Unlocking the way to deter car thieves

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

TRAVELLING in a mate's smart new car the other day, I noticed a steering-wheel lock on the back seat. Remember those? There was a time, in the days when car locks were dead easy to pick, when a bright yellow disc bolted to your steering wheel was a deterrent. Next, for a few years, car locks became really hard to crack; then they got too keylessly hi-tech for their own good. Today, thanks to the magic of the microchip, any scally with the right electronic gizmo can drive off any limo he chooses. Hence the rebirth of the humble steering-wheel lock, the ultimate deterrent against crooks who are experts on computer programming but don't know how to use a hacksaw.

ON a visit to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Environment Secretary Michael Gove says leaving the EU might allow Britain to impose higher animal-welfare standards and combat puppy smuggling. Why was this not mentioned during the referendum campaign? Why were our heartstrings not tugged by the ultimate campaign slogan? Vote Brexit - or the puppies get it.

POPE Francis wants to drop "lead us not into temptation" from the Lord's Prayer, on the grounds that God does not lead humans to sin. His Holiness suggests replacing it with "do not let us fall into temptation," explaining: "It's Satan who leads us into temptation, that's his department."

HANG on a moment. The only reason that Satan can tempt humans is that the Almighty made us so very temptable (remember that unfortunate business with the apple and serpent?). Most of the Old Testament is about God creating sinners and then punishing them for sinning. It's a bit daft which may explain why the priesthood kept the Bible in Latin for so many centuries and had a plentiful supply of firewood to deal with any peasant heard uttering the words: "It's a bit daft."

KIDS at a primary school in Telford who forgot their PE kit were invited to take part wearing their underpants. At least one parent complained but the authorities insisted that all the pupils enjoyed the lesson. I bet. I recall with a shudder being sent into the school swimming bath naked, aged 12, having carelessly left my trunks at home. Everyone enjoyed that, too. Except me. I really must sort out that claim for post-traumatic stress.

HE is 53 and presumably allowed to choose his own clothes. So whatever possessed Prince Edward to pose for a formal photograph at his home, Bagshot Park, wearing a bow tie, velvet smoking jacket, tartan trousers and monogrammed slippers? Most odd.

CLASSY response to my item on the snowflake generation from a reader who points out: "I don't object to the term Snowflake. We're seeing at the moment what they can do when they get together, aren't we?" At the time he wrote, a few billion snowflakes flexed their muscles and paralysed the nation. But then they very quickly got overheated and ran away.

OUR changing language. According to the BBC website: "The snow showers have sweeped across into London." Meanwhile, Mail Online reports someone being 'murdered to death'.

WE are still a long way from being a fully online society. The Office for National Statistics reckons nearly half of single pensioners have no internet access. And it's a fair guess that many of these older folks are claiming benefits, or at least trying to. Any Answers (Radio 4) took a call from a woman who, having no internet access in her home, had to use a computer at her local library to apply for benefit. When her passport and driving licence were not accepted for identification purposes, the system advised her to download an app to her smartphone. Seriously. That was my angriest moment of the week and I dare say some of you shared it.

MY sympathy for starving songbirds evaporated in the first 48 hours of Ye Great Freeze. If the little idiots would only eat, instead of posing and posturing at each other, they would fare a lot better. Robins bully blackbirds who bully tits who bully wagtails who waste hundreds of calories wagging, as the name suggests, their tails. So much wasted energy, so little brainpower.

TALKING POINT

Payouts are taking cash from those in real need

IT'S good to know that, while the country awaits the outcome of Brexit negotiations, there are still some inevitabilities during uncertain times.

We can all be sure of death, taxes and Australia winning the Ashes. Now, it seems unwanted phone calls are a constant. We have all had them. People trying to sell you something, claims for PPI, better energy deals. But in this day an age of cost-cutting and austerity, it seems there is a new scourge on society, spurious accident claims.

'Have You Had An Accident At Work?' the helpline commercial yells. "Our records tell me you've had an accident recently," says the voice on the phone.

And they know that how, exactly? Of course the standard response would be something along the lines of: "No, but you will have one if you keep calling." Or throw them completely by claiming your head fell off, like comedian Rob Beckett.

Seriously, though, it seems the compensation craze is the latest fad. Often we hear of members of the public making spurious claims for minor incidents – or in some cases no accident at all – just to cash in. More astonishingly, supposedly cash-strapped authorities are paying out.

Croydon Council, for example, paid out nearly £6 million in personal injury claims over the last three years. These, staggeringly included £43,000 to a child who needed surgery to remove a splinter after sitting on a playground bench.

There was an £81,000 to a claimant who broke a leg by jumping over the gate at a locked car park and another payout of £181,000 to someone who tripped on a pavement damaged during works. And let's not forget the £18,000 for the schoolboy hit by a javelin during a PE lesson.

A police officer even received £12,000 after being bitten by a flea, while in August a woman was 'hit' by a taxi in an alleged attempt to cash in. The taxi firm's boss admitted that without the dashcam footage, they would not have been protected against a potential payout.

John O'Connell, of the TaxPayers' Alliance, said the 'compensation culture' diverted cash from essential services such as social care and road maintenance.

Too right. With the NHS in dire straits, care homes closing and important transport links axed, one can see his point. But these claimants serve to line their own pockets without a thought for what taxpayers' money is spent on. We all know how The Boy Who Cried 'Wolf' ends. We can only hope for a similar outcome when these 'injured parties' really are hurt.

MARK SHIPP

We need more libraries that open longer

DUDLEY Council, under Pete Lowe and his Labour team, did the Conservative Government's bidding and slashed the hours that our libraries opened. We used to be able to get into Halesowen library up to 7pm. That was all stopped.

Then I read that libraries in the borough are used by 18 per cent of the people and the percentage has fallen. On the face of things it may look like a bad headline, but as my old dad used to say: "Look deeper, kid, and you'll find it is hardly surprising?" If the politicians cut the hours that Buckingham Palace was opened – currently having a refurbishment costing £350 million – you can bet that visitor numbers would fall. It is obvious, isn't it?

Over the years, we have seen the library – a hub of this community – being run down with a reduction in staff, floors for library use and in its stock. There has always been in place a draconian management.

I do admire the hard-working staff who do their best to remain positive. It is to the dedicated staff we should look to guidance for improvements, because they know the library and its users.

Councillor Ken Finch warns us of the dangers of having volunteers running centres and such like. A Labour councillor! From the very party who cut the hours and gave libraries away to Greenwich Leisure. I remember the Labour Council Leader at the time saying it was exciting!

Take a real Labour man, Jeremy Corbyn, who is against such cuts, and he would agree that the Labour council made wrong decisions in office time after time. The emphasis is too often on the negative. Why not open new libraries? Let's educate our children and adults since we never stop learning, we progress. The money is always there for war, but not it seems for libraries, leisure centres and the NHS.

C STOLL
Halesowen

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
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Prank was stupid and not funny

WHO in their right mind decides with his friends to cement his head with Polyfilla inside a microwave?

I have read and heard things in my time which beggar belief. However, the man in a child's body takes the biscuit.

I dare say there could be many answers. So much for a YouTube joke – I think not!

Firefighters' precious time was taken up by this man and his friends. I hope they hang their heads in shame.

It would be justifiable for the fire service to charge this person for the time they spent rescuing him!

As a footnote, I dare say Polyfilla works!

Why not stick his feet in it, sit him on a bench, and let us all go and tell him what an idiot he's been?

DEIRDRE WOOD
Coseley

New deal sounds like extortion racket

EXTORTION rackets can take many forms, for example:

a) "We've made ya an offer ya caint refuse. We've sent ya tha ear and tha little finger. Hand over tha £40,000 and you'll get tha kid back as long as ya don't bring in da cops."

OR

b) "Okay so you'll pay the 40+ billion in readies and maybe we'll give ya the worthless trade deal as long as ya don't tell ya taxpayers about tha cash."

Both are perfect examples, the only difference is the number of zeros on the payment.

ALAN M ETHERIDGE
Dudley

The council can't grit every road

I HAVE read a large number of complaints on social media about gritting of roads during the cold spell.

I even read one that said it was not good to leave people unable to get off their drives for two or three days.

Come on people, how on earth can you expect councils to grit every road in the borough?

Main roads and bus routes have to take priority.

It is hard to get about, I know, but we are all in the same boat that live in side roads. It's tough but we only get snow now and again.

The options are stay in, risk going out, clear it yourself or move to a main road in preparation for the next lot of snow.

The council cannot achieve the impossible and your road has no more precedence than any other side road.

JENNY JAMES
Wordsley

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Gang jailed for drug and phone drone prison delivery service

MEMBERS of a crime gang from the Black Country have been jailed after using drones to fly drugs and mobile phones into prisons across England and Scotland.

Craig Hickinbottom, who directed the 'large-scale' operation from behind bars, was jailed for a further seven years and two months.

Drone pilot Mervyn Foster received a sentence of six years and eight months for his part, which involved 49 drone flights and four 'throw-overs'.

Birmingham Crown Court was told the offences were committed between July 2015 and May this year at jails in Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Birmingham, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Liverpool, and Perth in Scotland. Remote-controlled drones, equipped with a fishing line and hooks, were flown to cell windows. CCTV showed prisoners then visiting the cells and leaving with packages.

Hickinbottom's 32-year-old partner, Lisa Hodgetts, from Tividale, admitted money laundering and was given a 16-month suspended prison term.

Hickinbottom, 35, a prisoner at HMP Featherstone near Wolverhampton, and later HMP Hewell, organised deliveries to both jails. He admitted four counts of conspiring to bring contraband into prison, and conspiracy to supply psychoactive substances.

Organiser

Foster, of High Street, Tipton, was described as the conspiracy's 'prime organiser on the outside'. The 36-year-old, a petty criminal with 31 convictions, worked with John Quinn, 35, of Swancroft Road, Tipton. Quinn was jailed for four years and eight months after admitting three counts of conspiracy and another of conspiring to supply psychoactive substances.

Hickinbottom's brother, 50-year-old John Hickinbottom, was jailed for four years and eight months for his role. Terry Leach, 19, of Wednesbury Oak Road, Tipton, was given a two-year suspended sentence. Ashley Rollinson, 21, of Waiver Road, Brierley Hill, who was involved for one day, was jailed for 11 months but has served his sentence on remand. Yvonne Hay, 41, and Francis Ward, of Bloxwich Road, Walsall, were jailed for two years, four months.

£1m target for new manager

THE new general manager of Lye shot blasting business Quality Blasting is looking to grow its turnover and expand its factory space.

Andy Tarr, who has 36 years of engineering experience, recently joined the business on Old Forge Trading Estate after it was bought by metal finishing firm ActOn Ventures of Coventry. Quality Blasting was originally formed in Birmingham during the Second World War to blast-clean shells for the defence industry, and has around 80 regional customers for domestic and commercial finishing jobs.

Mr Tarr, is aiming to increase annual turnover past the £1m mark at the company, which has a team of 11, and has been at Lye since the 1980s.

Staff ensured orphans got their presents

Sarita Pearson, left, Emma Edwards and Marie Woodhouse, right

EMPLOYEES at Brierley Hill-based insurance broker Gallagher gave their time to collect hundreds of donation boxes, which have been shipped to an orphanage in Romania in time for a Christmas surprise.

Caminul Felix, an orphanage based in western Romania, has been supporting the needs of the orphaned and abandoned children of Romania since 1990. The independent Christian organisation has worked together with a Stourbridge church, Amblecote Christian Centre, which appealed for items to be sent to the children for Christmas.

For the second year running, the team at Gallagher, based at Custom House, The Waterfront, contributed to filling shoeboxes for the children containing essential items including toiletries, along stationary and beauty products. The team also donated clothing.

Sarita Pearson, sales and marketing co-ordinator at Gallagher, was joined by colleagues Marie Woodhouse and Emma Edwards who spent a day collecting and sorting the donations from the Gallagher office and from local schools and communities.

She said: "We were extremely proud of the achievements from last year and wanted to continue the donations for a second year."

The team volunteered to help collect a total of more than 250 boxes from other donors. A lorry successfully delivered the gifts to the orphanage.

Primary schools fall in national league tables

DUDLEY dropped to 143rd in the national league tables – despite an improvement in the number of children hitting benchmark grades.

Across the borough, 55 per cent of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. It marked a six per cent improvement on last year but still saw the authority slip 21 places in the rankings.

Dudley's best performing school was Our Lady and St Kenelm in Halesowen, which saw 97 per cent of 34 pupils eligible for the tests achieve benchmark grades.

Brierley Hill Primary School in Mill Street came second on 90 per cent, while Pedmore Church of England Primary School was third on 81 per cent.

Councillor Anne Millward, cabinet member for children's services, said: "We recognise that in a number of schools attainment remains below expected levels and our school improvement officers work closely with school leaders to provide support and challenge to all schools of concern.

"In order to raise standards across all key stages Dudley Council will continue to work with a range of partners to strengthen teacher recruitment and retention, secure strong leadership and ensure that all children receive a good standard of education."

Sandwell dropped ten places to 115th with its top performing primary being Ocker Hill Academy in Tipton.

Award for a Simply Marvellous heart nurse

A HEART failure specialist nurse has received an award for her work. Sarah Mills,who works at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, has been received a 'You're Simply Marvellous' award. She works with patients living in the Bromsgrove area at clinics and visiting patients in their homes, to provide treatment, advice and support .

Simon Sims and Pauline Whitehouse in Simon's pre-slim T-shirt

Slimline Simon loses third of body weight in seven months

by Luke Bartlett

HE used to be 25 stone and lived on a diet of takeaways, ready meals, crisps and biscuits. But in a quest to get fit and find love, 51-year-old Simon Sims decided enough was enough and lost an extraordinary eight stone in just 28 weeks.

The Stourbridge man joined Slimming World back in May and teamed up with consultant Pauline Whitehouse who had previously lost nine stone herself.

Mr Sims said: "I had to do something or my outlook did not look good. My weight ballooned to 25 stone, I lacked confidence, had no friends and my health was suffering. I walked past a Slimming World group at Chawn Hill Church in Pedmore, and I heard clapping and cheering and decided this was my opportunity to do something about my weight.

"I have been a long term carer for my parents for the last 10 years. I lived on fast food, takeaways, ready meals and snacked on crisps and biscuits."

Mr Sims bagged Mr Sleek 2017 at the Slimming World Ball at the Copthorne Hotel.

Mr Sims said: "Over the 28 weeks I have made some amazing friends and best of all I have just met a lovely lady who I have fallen in love with. I am so looking forward to the future, 2018 looks so

Firm funds path at town's historic park

A NEW path has been created at a popular Dudley park thanks to money from a landfill grant.

Ibstock Cory Environment Trust, which has a base in Dudley, provides money each year for community projects.

This year, the waste firm has given £15,000 toward a new path taking people across an area called The Green at Priory Park in Dudley.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare said: "Priory Park is one of the best in Dudley and the Priory ruins have inclusive access for the elderly and disabled. The Green, in contrast, had a crazy paving path built in the 1960s, so it was important to upgrade the path so everyone can use it safely."

Angela Haymonds, secretary of Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust said: "ICET is delighted to have provided funding to enhance Priory Park. We hope the path across The Green encourages more people to use it."

Sex assault instructor's prison term is increased

Report by Marion Brennan

A DRIVING instructor who sexually touched teenaged pupils has had his prison sentence extended after two more victims spoke up.

Gary Rolinson, who ran the Kingswinford-based 500+ Driving School, would touch his students on the thigh when they made errors, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard.

The first pupil, aged 17, blocked Rolinson's hand, telling him: "I get the picture, there's no need to do that." When the instructor touched him on his genitals over his clothes, he grabbed his hand and told him to 'pack it in.'

Gary Rolinson

But the predatory instructor became 'quite blatant' in his behaviour, making lewd comments even in front of a female pupil to whom they were giving a lift, said Ms Samantha Crabb, prosecuting.

He told the second pupil, who was just 16, that touching him on the thigh 'helped with his clutch control'.

The teenager tried to treat his behaviour as a joke but Rolinson became emboldened when he realised the young man was not going to report him.

One time he told him to stop the car in a country lane and asked him to have intercourse. The youngster felt the best response was to laugh it off but the instructor reminded him of the request during subsequent lessons.

Admitted

The defendant, now 62, last week admitted 10 offences of sexual touching involving the two young men between 2009 and 2014. His appearance at Wolverhampton Crown Court came almost two years after he was jailed for similar offences involving six teenagers during driving lessons between 2012 and 2014.

Following a 14-day trial Rolinson was found guilty of 13 offences of sexual assault and one of causing a person to engage in sexual activity.

On that occasion a pupil spoke anonymously about the devastating effect Rolinson's behaviour had had on him.

He said: "I felt vulnerable and violated. Because I'm a boy I felt as though I couldn't say anything. It was as if people would laugh at me or not believe me."

Increasing Rolinson's four-year sentence to five years and nine months, Judge James Burbidge, QC, ordered that he register as a sex offender for life. He praised his victims for having the courage to come forward, saying they had carried the burden of Rolinson's 'secret'.

2,800 drink-drivers caught in 12 months

MORE than 2,500 motorists have been charged with drink-driving in the West Midlands and Staffordshire Police force areas in the last year.

In the 12 months to May, there were 1,833 people charged in the West Midlands – 6.47 per 10,000 population – and 990 in Staffordshire – 8.89 per 10,0000.

A total of 1,112 drivers were charged in the West Mercia force area – 8.9 per 10,000.

The results, based on Freedom of Information requests, have prompted calls for better public transport in rural areas and warnings to anyone tempted to drink and drive over the festive period not to do so as it could result in tragedy, prison and a road ban.

A total of 31 forces out of 45 provided figures.

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Dudley's Top Church joins bid for £1m revival grant

A £1 MILLION bid to help revamp Dudley's landmark church has moved a step closer.

A major project is under way to revitalise St Thomas and St Luke's in Dudley – known as Top Church.

The Diocese of Worcester, which oversees the church, is looking to secure a seven figure sum from the Church Commissioners' funding to upgrade the historic building at High Street, along with another major church in the diocese, All Saints Church in Worcester.

A phase one application has been agreed but now a more detailed bid needs to be submitted and the diocese will find out if it has been successful in the summer.

Part of the proposals will be to see the congregation grown as well as rebuild part of the church.

The Bishop of Dudley the Rt Rev Graham Usher said: "It's good news for Dudley that the Church Commissioners are actively considering an application for a major grant to support Top Church.

Skyline

"We have plans that this iconic church on Dudley's skyline can be revitalised and renewed.

"If the congregation can grow in number, as we plan, then the Church of England will be able to better serve the needs of the town."

Sam Setchell, spokeswoman for the Diocese of Worcester, added: "We haven't been granted any funding yet. We have been given the green light to proceed with the next stage. It is good news. We hope Top Church will become a resource church, that it will be refurbished and redeveloped to help bring more life to the congregation."

Top Church dates back to the 12th Century but was rebuilt in 1815.

Firms are chosen for major revamp

A MAJOR regeneration plan, which will see a multi-screen cinema and restaurants built, has moved closer as preferred developers were chosen.

The multi-million-pound Lion Fields scheme is planned to rejuvenate part of Kidderminster town centre including the former Glades Leisure Centre site.

Cordwell Property Group, based in Belbroughton, and Peveril Securities, part of Bowmer & Kirland, will be responsible for carrying out phase one of the scheme. A formal planning application is expected in the summer.

Councillor Ian Hardiman, Wyre Forest District Council planning boss, said: "It is very exciting to see the council's ambitions moving closer to fruition. It is important that this first phase of redevelopment acts as the catalyst."

Posties are first class says MP on visit

Stourbridge MP Margot James meets postal staff in the town to thank them for their hard work

STOURBRIDGE MP Margot James visited the Royal Mail in the town to see first-hand Christmas post being delivered and to greet its hardworking staff.

Ms James was shown around the town's delivery office where she was introduced to postmen and women.

The festive season is Royal Mail's busiest period, as millions of people shop online for gifts and send Christmas cards and parcels.

She said: "At no other time is the hard work and dedication of postmen and women clearer than during the festive period. There is a huge amount of effort and dedication that goes into delivering a first-class Christmas.

"It was great to meet the team here at Stourbridge and thank them for the extraordinary lengths they go to to ensure Christmas cards and presents are delivered to loved ones on time, and for all they do year-round."

The Festive Season is Royal Mail's busiest period, as millions of people shop online for gifts and send Christmas cards and parcels.

Glenn Morris, Royal Mail Delivery Office Manager, said: "Our postmen and women are working extremely hard to deliver Christmas cards, letters and parcels to people in Stourbridge. We are grateful that Margot visited the office to see our operation and to support the team."

£6k is raised at hospice family day

MORE than £6,000 was raised at a Christmas-themed family day held in the grounds of Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge in aid of the charity on Saturday, December 9.

Despite heavy snowfall the day before, hospice staff, volunteers and supporters braved the weather to put on a Christmas themed family day, which included a craft market, all-day BBQ, live music, visits by characters from Disney's Frozen, face-painting, and the children also had the opportunity to meet Santa and his reindeer.

The day marked the inaugural Stourbridge Sparkling Spectacular, which will become an annual festive family weekend including the hospice's annual cCoffee morning and Santa Jog, which had to be put back a week (see front page).

Laura Millard, event organiser, said: "We're so overwhelmed by the support we've received and can't thank our supporters enough for braving the weather. Community spirit won the day and we'll never forget the sight of hundreds of supporters crossing the snow-kissed grounds of the hospice to come and raise money for our patients. It was a special day and we can't wait to do it all again next year."

To find out more, visit www.marystevenshospice.co.uk website.

Spotlight on royal friendship story

ROYAL historical drama Victoria & Abdul will be shown at a regular cinema night in Stourbridge.

It focuses on the true story of an unexpected friendship in the later years of Queen Victoria's rule.

The film, starring Judi Dench and Ali Fazal, will be shown at Stourbridge Town Hall on February 5.

League of Gentlemen to go local at Arena

THE League of Gentlemen is set to bring its first UK tour in 12 years to Birmingham next year.

The BAFTA-winning show, starring Reece Shearsmith, Steve Pemberton, Mark Gatiss and Jeremy Dyson, follows the lives of the bizarre townspeople that reside in the fictional Royston Vasey.

The series ended in 2002, and was followed by a film The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse and a stage production The League of Gentlemen Are Behind You! in 2005.

It returned to TV screens this week to update viewers with the strange, and often disturbing, goings-on at Royston Vasey.

In a statement the cast of the live show said: "The League of Gentlemen started as a live show over 20 years ago and in many ways performing in front of an audience gives us the biggest thrill of all. We're overjoyed to be taking the citizens of Royston Vasey on a road-trip and can't wait to see all the wonderful local places."

The League of Gentlemen will appear at Arena Birmingham on September 14, 2018, and tickets went on sale at 9am yesterday (Wednesday).

Chimps chomping on festive veg at zoo

Lower Primates Senior Keeper Jodie Dryden with veggie feast

THE winter weather may have meant some cancelled festive meals for the human population of Dudley but provided a bonus for apes at Dudley Zoo.

Sprouts and potatoes were on the menu for seven female chimps at the Castle Hill attraction when the recent heavy snow meant not so many folks turning up for meals at a local pub.

They enjoyed a festive feast thanks to a donation from nearby business The Fellows pub.

Bosses at The Broadway bar donated eight large tubs of leftover steamed seasonal carrots, sprouts, potatoes and peas to primate keepers at Dudley Zoo, who dished them out to their grateful apes.

Lower primates senior keeper, Jodie Dryden, said: "We were offered the freshly steamed vegetables from the pub staff, who had surplus leftovers following the recent wintry weather.

"We're thankful to The Fellows for thinking of us and the girls all enjoyed tucking into an early Christmas dinner."

More than 1,000 empty homes despite crisis

MORE than 1,000 homes across Sandwell are empty – with almost 300 vacant for at least five years, new figures show.

Hundreds of private properties were classed as 'long-term vacant' including 83 which have not been lived in for 10 years.

It comes as housing bosses continue to battle a mounting housing waiting list in the borough. Figures published under the Freedom of Information Act showed there are currently a total of 1,087 properties which have been empty for more than six months. Of these, 666 have been vacant for two years, 214 for five years and 83 for a decade.

Sandwell Council leader Steve Eling said the number of empty privately owned properties was 'massively frustrating', particularly as the authority faces a constant challenge to house families, as well as having to find land to build new developments.

He said that empty private homes were contributing to a 'national housing crisis'.

Cannabis factory burglary bust

A MAN who had fallen on hard times allowed his home in Wordsley to be used as a cannabis factory.

Jason Bray, aged 41, got chatting to a man outside a pub soon after taking the lease on the three-bedroomed property in Brierley Hill Road. He allowed it to be used for growing cannabis plants on the understanding he would receive payment when the drugs were sold, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard. But he was caught after a burglary at the house – reported by neighbours – during which some of the plants were stolen. Mr Mark Phillips, prosecuting, said police were alerted to the break-in in May and discovered a cannabis factory in full operation inside.

Seventy one plants in the early stages of production were found along with 50 empty pots, those which had been stolen in the burglary.

The total potential street value of the crop was estimated to be between £35,000 and £100,000.

Investigating officers found a council tax bill addressed to Bray at the property.

In the meantime he had contacted a solicitor and voluntarily went to the police station to own up to his part in the operation.

Mr Henry Skudra, defending, argued Bray had taken no part in the running of the operation and had been suffering from depression following a series of family tragedies and had started smoking cannabis after losing his job.

Bray, of Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, who admitted allowing his home to be used for the production of cannabis, was given a 12-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months. He was also ordered to carry out 120 hours unpaid work and pay £100 towards costs.

Drifters bring decades of soul

VETERAN American soul group The Drifters will be performing at Dudley Town Hall on May 25.

The Drifters were founded in June 1953, by George Treadwell and Ahmet Ertegun, founder of Atlantic Records. Since their creation the band has featured over 65 vocalists. Their hits include online Saturday Night at the Movies, Under The Boardwalk and Save The Last Dance for Me. Call (01384) 812812 or see bo roughhalls.co.uk website.

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Successful Slimmers have it all wrapped up for a light Christmas

Four fantastic slimmers are celebrating their own personal weight loss journey this Christmas, and have set themselves a new challenge for 2018 – to help others. All four have trained as Consultants for Slimming World, the UK's leading slimming club.

Natalie Howard, mum-of-two, will be relaunching the Pensnett group which meets at the Community Centre every Thursday. She says, "I tried to lose weight before but never stuck to diets because I always felt hungry. Now I can eat unlimited pasta, potatoes, rice, meat, fish, poultry, veg and fruit and still lose weight". Natalie will be welcoming new and existing members from 28th December. *Follow her Facebook Page 'Slim with Natalie'*.

Michelle Lee, who also works for the NHS can't wait to support people the way she has been supported in her local group. She says "I feel in control of my life again. Eating guilt free is magic. I'm excited about helping people prevent conditions such as diabetes and heart disease". Michelle opens a new group in Dudley Town on Tuesday 2nd Jan at Wellington Road Community Centre.

Read about her story on her *Facebook page Slimming World with Michelle, Dudley'*.

Kathy De Cicco, self-confessed takeaway fanatic, has changed the way she shops, cooks and eats. She says "I felt really anxious before I joined Slimming World – I wasn't sure it would work. Now having dropped the pounds, my knees no longer hurt and my asthma has cleared. It's helped me become the person I was meant to be - confident, happy, energetic and slim!" Kathy will be opening a new group on Wednesday 3rd Jan at Woodside Community Centre. Follow her Facebook Page '*Woodside Slimming World*'.

Ann Nash, a local teacher, opens a new group in Dudley Wood on Tues 2nd Jan. She explains 'As a slimmer, being able to eat 'normally' and enjoy the same meals as your family but still lose weight is unique. I never feel deprived. I still have my weekly fish and chips! I can't wait to share the secret with others". Follow her journey on Facebook page '*Ann's Slimming World at Dudley Wood*'.

Dudley Council funding weight loss

People living in a DY postcode, with weight to lose may be eligible for 12 weeks FREE membership to a Slimming World group. Call a local Consultant or 01384 732402 for more details

Left to right: New Slimming World Consultants Natalie Howard, Michelle Lee, Kathy DeCicco and Ann Nash

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Dudley Town
Wellington Road Community Centre, DY1 1UB
Tuesday 7.30pm
Tel: Michelle 07821 562840

NEW GROUP OPENING 3rd JAN
Woodside
Woodside Community Centre, DY2 0SZ
Wednesday 7.30pm
Tel: Kathy 07537 902302

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Dudley Wood Methodist church,
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NORTON
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Victim faced 'toughest year' after hit by lorry

A MAN who was seriously injured when hit by a lorry says he wants his experience to 'act as a warning'.

Matthew Bloomer, from Brierley Hill, has spoken for the first time about his battle to overcome multiple injuries after he was hit on a pedestrian crossing

The 23-year-old suffered bleeding on the brain, a fractured skull, multiple fractures to bones in his face as well as nine broken ribs when he was knocked down as he crossed the road.

Matthew waited until the green man was showing before stepping out but as he did so he was hit by a lorry that had driven through a red light.

Coma

He spent three weeks in hospital in an induced coma following the crash.

Matthew is now receiving support from legal firm Irwin Mitchell to secure funds to pay for his rehabilitation.

After the lorry driver pleaded guilty to dangerous driving, Matthew has now spoken of his battle to overcome his injuries.

He said: "I cannot actually remember the accident happening. To a certain extent I am glad of this. I understand that it took various teams of paramedics, air ambulance crew and police officers to ensure that I got to hospital and stayed alive, all of which I am vastly grateful for.

"It was a quick three weeks for me but it became a very long period of time for my loved ones. They didn't know if I was going to live or die.

"I have been told by a fair few medical professionals that on paper I should have been dead."

Matthew was walking to work when he was hit by the lorry on a crossing near Merry Hill shopping centre on May 18.

Matthew Bloomer suffered major injuries after he being hit on a crossing

Moments after the crash, his partner Scott drove past the scene and saw Matthew injured in the road, before he was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham.

Matthew added: "I worry now that I have become a burden, especially on my partner.

"I would like to think that after the toughest year of my life, my family and I deserve for this to be laid to rest. My hope in the long term is for no more bodily pain, no more sleepless nights and no more tears. I would like to have the Christmas with Scott that I feel we deserve after such a traumatic year.

"I hope my experience acts as a warning as to the terrible consequences of not paying attention on the roads can have."

The HGV driver, Lloyd Southall, admitted causing serious injury by dangerous driving when he appeared at Walsall Magistrates' Court recently.

The 40-year-old of Brierley Hill Road, Dudley, will be sentenced at Wolverhampton Crown Court on January 5.

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The Lion King

The smash-hit story of Simba the lion and his Serengeti journey from runaway to ruler of the plains has been a sell-out success ever since it opened on Broadway in 1997 and at London's Lyceum Theatre in 1999.

A theatre adaptation of a Disney classic, with music by Elton John and Tim Rice, a musical score by Hans Zimmer, arrangements by Lebo M and a plot loosely based on Hamlet, this multiple Tony and Olivier award-winning show has become the top-earning title in box office history, surpassing Lloyd Webber's Phantom of the Opera.

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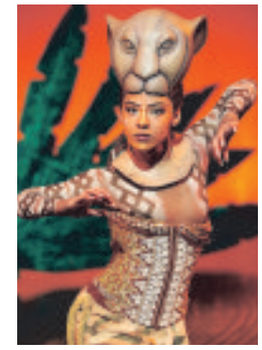

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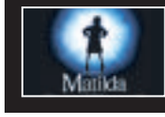

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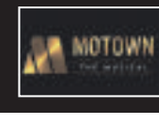

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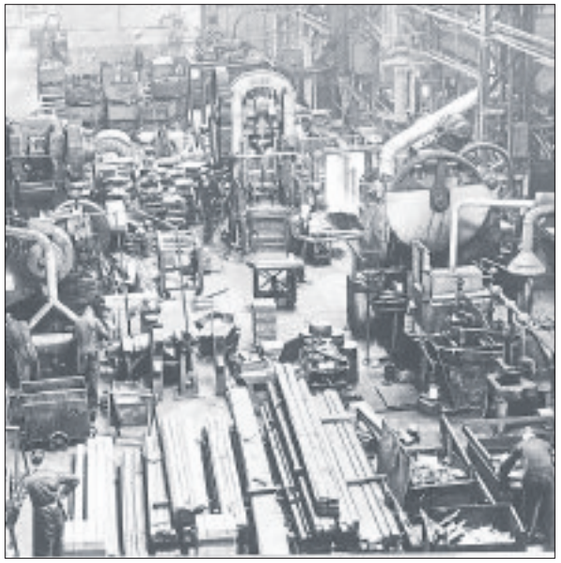
One of the precious archived images, a Christmas 'post early' message stunt featuring Dudley Zoo elephant Meena

Ken Dodd celebrates Dudley Hippodrome's birthday in 1957, and amazingly, he's still pulling in the crowds at theatres today

Chris Leggett, MNA Media director of marketing and communications and Express & Star deputy editor, Diane Davies, with E&S photo archives volunteers, in Wolverhampton



Interior of the Rubery Owen factory in Darlaston in its heyday

Archive future is bright thanks to sterling efforts of volunteers

MEMORY LANE

Report by Jordan Harris

VOLUNTEERS who are working to preserve thousands of photographs in our sister paper, the Express & Star's digital archive, have been thanked for their efforts.

The digital Express & Star Photo Archive will see historical pictures of the public, architecture and events in the Black Country and beyond preserved safely online.

The project, which involves sifting through shelf after shelf of files to organise images for digitisation, has been transformed through the help of a group of volunteers.

An archive picture of demolition work under way, the Danilo cinema in Cannock

Betty McCann, Kathy Hughes, Patricia Hughes, Christine West, Brian Lester, Ann Eales and Jackie Harrison, were among those who gave up a combined total of 260 days of goodwill time to help organise our physical archive ready for its transition to digital.

They were treated to a presentation at the Express & Star's head office on how their work is helping to keep memories of years gone by alive, as well as a special lunch.

Back in 2014, little detailed information was known about our archive, which had become disorganised and in need of restructuring for transfer online.

So far, 65,000 photos have been sorted, mainly around the categories of war, changing landscape and industry thanks to the volunteers.

The initiative aims to carry out vital archiving work, digitise the collection and make the photographs available through a single web portal, allowing free online public access to the unrivalled images of local events, momentous and everyday, for the first time.

Chris Leggett, MNA Media director of marketing and communications, said: "We have a lot to thank our volunteers for and it was a pleasure to welcome them to the Express & Star head office to thank them personally."

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Amazon fire arrest

A MAN has been arrested in connection with a large blaze at Amazon which caused severe damage and saw scores of staff being evacuated.

Staffordshire Police confirmed the 21-year-old suspect from Walsall has been bailed.

The flames ripped through two floors of the 700 sq ft fulfilment centre at Power Station Road, Rugeley. It broke out around 12.15pm on Saturday, November 4, and took several hours to get under control

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service said it was only the sprinkler system which prevented the fire spreading.

A large amount of smoke logging was caused to the building.

A police spokeswoman stated: "A 21-year-old man from the Walsall area was arrested in connection with the fire, he has been released under investigation."

Staff boost refuge cash

A TEAM of staff from a Midlands law firm teamed up with Rotarians to help Black Country Women's Aid.

A cash donation was given and a variety of toys, gifts and toiletries were collected as Thursfields Solicitors joined forces with Halesowen and Rowley Regis Rotary Club, before Santa visited streets on his charity sleigh.

Black Country Women's Aid began 30 years ago with the opening of a small refuge for women and children living in fear to escape violence and sexual abuse. There are now six refuges which last year supported more than 8,000 people.

Passengers warned of Christmas train chaos

RAIL passengers have been warned to prepare for large-scale disruption over Christmas.

Major engineering work at Smethwick will see the line between Wolverhampton and Birmingham closed from December 27 to January 3 – meaning there will be no trains from Sandwell and Dudley station.

The work is set to cause misery for people who were due to travel on the trains over Christmas. Rail bosses have apologised to passengers but said the job is essential and will be carried out when many people are off work over the festive period.

Travellers will instead be able to get on replacement buses. Engineers will be replacing a major junction on the tracks at Smethwick as part of the latest phase of the Birmingham New Street resignalling project aimed at improving services across the Midlands.

Check

Track and signals dating as far back as the 1960s will be replaced.

The £250 million scheme will put the busy section of track connecting the two cities, used by thousands of people in the Black Country every day, out of action.

Passengers have been urged to check their journeys ahead of the work starting.

Richard Dugdale, Network Rail's senior scheme sponsor for the work, said: "Half the normal number of people travel by train at Christmas and New Year so we are seizing the opportunity to complete a huge amount of signalling and track upgrades.

"That way we cause the least amount of disruption to the fewest number of people. Train passengers should check before they travel on nationalrail.co.uk and allow extra time for their journeys."

Kaos as kickboxers rake in charity cash

Coach Dylan Fitzpatrick, centre, with members Anne Withington, Chris Howell, Eddie Gripton, Jason Sands and Revina Dhande

A GENEROUS fundraiser is boxing clever with his charity nights netting cash for a hospital.

Kaos Kickboxing coach Dylan Fitzpatrick has organised a series of charity boxing matches to raise money for the Deanesly ward at New Cross Hospital. Five of the events have been held so far, with more planned next year.

Dylan, who is the head coach at Kaos Kickboxing, organised the fundraisers in memory of his late grandmother Mary Scott. She died of cancer at the age of 91 two years ago, before she was due to be admitted to the ward. He has since set out to raise as much as he can.

Now he is on the hunt for a new batch of boxing recruits ahead of the next event early next year. People are put through their paces for eight weeks before taking part in a matched boxing contest with another one of the trainees.

Dylan, 38, said "I was very close with my nan who was in hospital at New Cross. The charity boxing nights started after she passed away. The money is all gong to the ward."

Kaos Kickboxing is based in Owen Road, Wolverhampton. The next fundraiser is on March 24.

Sign-up nights are on January 2 and 22. To register, or for tickets, visit kaoskickboxing.co.uk or call 07772 658708.

Praise for the volunteers who kept NHS ticking over

MEDICS have thanked generous members of the public who rushed to their aid in the bad weather.

Diane Wake, chief executive at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, said: "We are overwhelmed with the amount of support we have received from all the volunteers across the local community who have come forward to help transport our staff to and from work.

"We have received a huge amount of support from over 70 volunteers with 4x4 vehicles and the West Midlands 4x4 response team following a plea for help on social media. The volunteers have helped to keep our services running by making sure our staff can get to and from work."

"We are also very fortunate that staff at the Trust have made every effort to come into work as normal and our district nurses have been walking to patients' homes where necessary."

Staff at The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust also worked tirelessly to make sure they kept New Cross Hospital running.

Steve Eden, from Stourbridge, said he clocked up more than 300 miles over 48 hours to ensure nurses got to work.

He said: "The NHS has cleared up a lot of health problems for me and my family in recent years. I heard that they were calling out for help at New Cross Hospital and so I looked on Facebook for people by me who needed help."

"Once one job started I would be tasked with another but I didn't mind, I consider it very little effort on my part compared with the job these nurses do."

Patients are being advised they will be contacted by the trust to rearrange any appointments cancelled due to the snow and ice.

Ex-pub site changed into nine new homes

WORK on nine houses on the site of a former landmark pub in Halesowen has been completed.

The development includes one detached and eight semi-detached homes, all constructed on the site of the former Wagon and Horses pub in Long Lane.

Halesowen-based estate agents Lex Allan Grove have put up sale boards in recent months with prices ranging from £192,000 to £220,000.

The popular pub was saved from closure by legendary Birmingham publican, Bob Nash, in 2010.

But due to a decline in footfall it abruptly closed in 2013 and was demolished shortly after. Planning permission was granted for houses by Dudley Council in November 2015.

Don't be half-cut! Bar-ber brothers go to Xtreme lengths

By Jamie Brassington

MAKE mine a short, back and cider! Customers can order a pint with their haircut after a barber shop installed a fully-licensed bar.

Brothers Joe, of Cradley Heath and Adam Ingram, of Stourbridge, run Xtreme Cutz in Cradley Heath. Named Carol's Bar in memory of their mother who died in 2014, it was opened on December 11 and is believed to be the borough's first barber shop with a licensed bar.

Joe, aged 27, said: "It is touching to be able to open the bar in honour of our mother."

The opening date fell on Carol's birthday, and marked 18 years since Adam, 35, opened the business. The brothers, who grew up in Halesowen, serve Special Cider, made in Quatt, Shropshire.

The bar took two months to build, and the brothers used businesses who are also their customers to carry out the work. Conditions of the licence means only people who pay for a haircut can be served alcohol.

Joe and Adam at their barber shop where a bar has opened

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Mayor calls for council to protect green belt

WEST Midlands Mayor Andy Street is calling on Dudley Council to rule out building on green belt land.

Mr Street has asked for the authority to make promises that countryside surrounding parts of Halesowen will not be used for housing.

Campaigners fear the green belt will make way for development needed in the Black Country as the population soars. And Dudley Council leader Patrick Harley said he could not promise open land in the area would not be built on.

During the election campaign Mr Street said he favoured protecting the green belt where possible and instead development should be built on brownfield sites.

Around 22,000 homes and 300 hectares for industrial use are needed in the Black Country by 2036, according to a planning document called the Black Country Core Strategy. Campaign group Halesowen Abbey Trust fears countryside in the south of Halesowen will accommodate around 6,000 homes and 75 hectares of industrial development.

Mayor Andy Street

In a letter to Councillor Harley, Mr Street said: "I recognise well the very considerable pressure all West Midlands local authorities are under to meet future housing needs.

"We are both committed to the policy of 'brownfield' first. I hope that a judgement on the value and effectiveness of 'green belt' can be applied. I support the views of the Halesowen Abbey Trust that the land they refer to is of particular importance, providing a valuable local amenity as well as beautiful green space.

"I very much hope that Dudley Council will be able to agree that no 'exceptional circumstance' condition will be met, and that the land can continue to enjoy the protection it warrants."

Dudley Council previously said a review of the green belt will likely start in January.

Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris backed campaigners. Trust leader Mick Freer said: "We hope that their lead will encourage other politicians to follow suit."

Gifts boxed up to help Women's Aid

STAFF from a law firm teamed up with Rotarians to help Black Country Women's Aid.

A cash donation was given and a variety of toys, gifts and toiletries were collected as Thursfields Solicitors joined forces with Halesowen & Rowley Regis Rotary Club.

Members of Thursfields' junior lawyer committee helped to collect the donations when Santa visited streets on his Rotary sleigh. Staff from Thursfields' Halesowen office involved in the sleigh collections included Charlotte Perry, Georgia Morris, Katie Morris, Kirsty Underhill, Nicola Pearce, Priya Ohri and Julie Cahill.

Donated

Pam Arrowsmith, a specialist family solicitor at the firm's Halesowen office, said: "Thursfields and Thursfields young lawyers have been glad to support the Rotary Club's Santa sleigh collections and have donated their part of the collection to Black Country Women's Aid this year."

Black Country Women's Aid began as Sandwell Women's Aid 30 years ago when a few women from West Bromwich opened a small refuge for women and children living in fear of domestic and sexual abuse.

The charity now has six refuges which last year supported more than 8,000 women and their children by providing a safe and welcoming place to stay.

Dedicated carer Lynne wins national award

A SELFLESS carer has been honoured with a national prize – with her bosses saying she would 'crawl on broken glass' to help others if she needed to.

Lynne Higgins, 47, from Netherton, won the caregiver of the year award over 8,000 other people from across the UK for her dedication to her job caring for the elderly.

Mrs Higgins, who works across Dudley borough and parts of Sandwell, has been known to go the extra mile.

The mother-of-two was honoured in the Home Instead Senior Care awards. She once bought a cuddly toy dog for a client with dementia who loved it so much she was even cremated with it.

Mrs Higgins also helped another client called Beryl, aged 84, walk again after a lengthy stay in hospital where she went for treatment after she had a fall that knocked the confidence.

Julie Williams, co-owner of Home Instead Senior Care Dudley and Sandwell South, said: "I know, hand on heart, that she would crawl on broken glass to a client if they needed her.

"We are incredibly proud to see that Lynne has been recognised from thousands of others as she believes so passionately in the care she delivers."

Family

Mrs Higgins who lives with her husband Steve also cares for two sons, 21-year-old Joe who has Worster drought syndrome, a type of Cerebral Palsy, and 13-year-old Peter who has Autism and insulin controlled diabetes.

Mrs Higgins said: "It was amazing to win – I really did not expect to at all."

"To me, I don't feel like I'm doing anything special, I just treat clients like they are my family – if you don't treat them like family then they're not getting the best care."

Lynne Higgins, centre, with Home Instead owner Ian Williams and business development manager Susan Love

Hundreds oppose 'garden city' homes plan at former tip

NEARLY 400 people have called for plans to build homes on a former tip in the Black Country to be scrapped.

Sandwell Council wants to create a large housing development on land off Temple Way, near Rattlechain Lagoon, Tividale, as part of its Dudley Port 'garden city' masterplan. But the proposals have raised concerns among people in the area with a petition having been handed to council bosses.

Ian Carroll, The Friends of Sheepwash Nature Reserve group secretary, said: "In terms of the specific site there's almost universal opposition amongst from local residents.The majority of signatures are from people who live in the surrounding streets. They included Gladstone drive, Law Close, Temple Way. People in that area, many of them remember all the extensive tipping. As for The Friends of Sheepwash, we want to see that area for wild life."

A total of 385 signatures were collected over a couple of weeks. Petitioners say they would like to see the site, situated between Sheepwash Local Nature Reserve and the Temple Way Estate, retained for wildlife.

The council has set itself a target of building 250 homes at the former brick works, that was later used for disposing of waste.

Accused says kidnap of model was a sham

A BLACK Country man accused of kidnapping a model has claimed the whole thing was staged so she could become famous.

Lukasz Herba, from Tividale, said Chloe Ayling was in on the plot and that the alleged kidnap, which took place in Italy, was a stunt.

The 30-year-old has been held by Italian police and a court in Milan last week rejected his claim that model Miss Ayling, 20, was in on the 'crime' to gain publicity.

She claims she was snatched, drugged and held hostage for six days after being lured to a fake modelling shoot in Milan in July.

Lukasz Herba and his brother Michal, 35, were subsequently arrested and accused of kidnapping the model. Polish-born Lukasz, who was living in Tividale, has claimed they already knew each other and that she agreed to a fake abduction in order to become a celebrity, according to reports.

Chloe Ayling – drugged

His lawyer, Katia Kolakowska, told a national newspaper: "He says the kidnap was a fabrication. They planned it together so she would become famous."

Invented

Lukasz Herba has insisted he did not knowingly take part in any crime.

A judge at the Corte d'Assise in Milan rejected an application by Ms Kolakowska, to force London mother-of-one Chloe to travel to Italy to be questioned in court.

Police claim the brothers are part of a group which sell women as sex slaves on the dark web to buyers in the Middle East.

Defence lawyers suggested the entire case may be a 'publicity stunt' to boost Ms Ayling's career. But Miss Ayling's former manager Phil Green has said the lawyers are 'in cloud cuckoo land' by suggesting the kidnap was staged.

Ms Ayling claimed she was sedated and bundled into the boot of a car on July 11, then held in a remote farmhouse. Miss Ayling has appeared on various television shows to tell her story.

Lukasz Herba – accused

Lukasz Herba was arrested after delivering Ms Ayling to the British Consulate in Milan six days after she was allegedly kidnapped.

His brother Michal was arrested by the National Crime Agency on a European Arrest Warrant in August and is fighting extradition to Italy.

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Jokers go wild in Jack's Grand pantomime show

FE-FI-FO-FUN – expect some giant laughs at Wolverhampton's big panto Jack And The Beanstalk.

It's silly, a bit saucy and spectacular too, delivering all the traditional pantomime cliches with a local twist in a guaranteed Grand night out.

Jack And The Beanstalk, on at the Lichfield Street theatre until January 14, has got famous faces off the telly, lots of pop songs, jokey mentions for local towns, a hissable villain, a flamboyant dame and... Super Yam.

Doreen Tipton's latest panto stunt, after wowing the audiences in her debut on a mobility scooter in last year's Aladdin, is to don a superhero outfit in a panto closing scene that nearly brought the house down.

Doreen (aka Walsall actress Gill Jordan) injects typically downbeat Black Country humour into a show that has no shortage of jokers.

Slapstick

Adam C Booth (perhaps best known as Keith Lemon's TV 'brother') is a highly energetic slapstick Simple Simon, whilst former Lichfield Garrick stalwart Ian Adams has some of the best lines and lots of stunning frocks as Dame Trot. But you may hope that some of their ruder double entendres fly over the children's heads.

Pop and stage star Gareth Gates shows a nice knack for humour too as Jack. I like him crooning If You Leave Me Cow to Daisy after he exchanges her for a bag of beans. His scene with love interest Jill (Sarah Vaughan, in fine voice) which is constantly interrupted by brother Simon was a howl, only topped by Mother Nature, played by Grand favourite Lisa Riley, with Dame, Simon and Doreen's chaotic 12 Days of Christmas.

They've bean had – Gareth Gates and Lisa Riley as Mother Nature in the panto

It ay cowin' fair – Doreen Tipton is floored by Daisy the 'Coo' at the Grand

The musical highlights, accompanied by hard-working dancers, included versions of Can't Stop The Feeling and Rather Be.

Gareth's big number was, of course, his chart-topping cover of Unchained Melody (the second top selling single of the noughties).

You always need some baddies and former The Bill actor Graham Cole fit the bill as Fleshcreep, main henchman for a giant who made a big, and I mean BIG, appearance in the second act.

Credit to for another Garrick regular, Julie Paton, who was a touch of class as the operatic-voiced giant's Harp.

If you've Bean you know, otherwise, give this panto a fe-fi-go.

LEON BURAKOWSKI

Whole lotta cash for Plant's Aston Martin

Robert Plant with the Aston Martin he had in the 1970s and 80s

Pictures: Nicholas Mee & Co

LED Zeppelin frontman Robert Plant's former Aston Martin is up for sale – and is sure to cost a whole lotta cash.

The Black Country rock legend bought the DB5 in the early 1970s and sold it in 1986 to a car collecting father/son team in the Midlands. The red DB5 is a 1965 model with 62,400 miles on the clock, and it has undoubtedly seen some Good Times (and) Bad Times.

In recent years the car has been restored and is now in 'an exemplary condition' according to Aston Martin specialists Nicholas Mee & Co who are selling it. Its colour is described as 'Dubonnet Rosso' while the interior is tan with four seats. A price for the motor is only available on request – with its seller estimating it could fetch more than £1 million.

Plant, 69, who was born in West Bromwich and went to school at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Stourbridge, sold the car in the '80s. It was entrusted to Chapman Spooner for restoration work and has been owned by Nicholas Mee & Co since 2008. A description says: "This iconic car can most accurately be described as having received, 'a Whole Lotta Love'."

The 'Dubonnet Rosso' DB5 today

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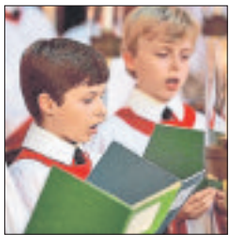
Christmas Eve

BBC 1

Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show, on at 8.30pm

6.00 Breakfast 7.25 Match of the Day (R) **9.05 FILM: Planes (2013)** ★★ **10.30 FILM: The Santa Clause (1994)** ★★★ **12.00 Life in the Snow** Gordon Buchanan meets animals that live in snowy conditions. (R) **1.00 BBC News;** Weather. **1.15 Songs of Praise: The Big Sing** Katherine Jenkins and JB Gill present a carol concert from the Royal Albert Hall. **1.45 Shaun the Sheep: The Farmer's Llamas** Shaun causes mayhem at a country fair. (R) **2.15 Hammy's Boomerang Adventure** Over the Hedge short spin-off. (R) **2.20 FILM: Monsters University (2013)** Animated comedy prequel, with the voices of John Goodman and Billy Crystal. ★★★

BBC 2



The annual service from King's College, Carols from King's, 5.45pm

6.15 Nature's Weirdest Events (R) **7.00 Island Parish Shetland** (R) **7.30 FILM: The Prince and Me (2004)** Romantic comedy, starring Julia Stiles and Luke Mably. ★★ **9.15 The Big Family Cooking Showdown** (R) **10.15 Saturday Kitchen Best Bites** Matt Tebbutt presents highlights of the series. **11.45 Mary Berry's Absolute Christmas Favourites** (R) **12.20 The Hairy Bikers Home for Christmas** Dave Myers and Si King create a series of festive recipes. **1.20 Alex Polizzi's Perfect Christmas** The hotelier presents a guide to entertaining at home over the festive period. (R) **2.20 Cheetahs – Growing Up Fast** Two years in the lives of a cheetah mother and her cubs. (R)

ITV

Bradley Walsh hosts, A Christmas Chase: Celebrity Special, 5.50pm

6.00 CITV: Sooty. (R) **6.10 Bottom Knocker Street** (R) **6.20 Bottom Knocker Street** (R) **6.35 Dino Dana** (R) **6.45 Super 4** (R) **7.00 Signed Stories: Share a Story** (R) **7.05 Om Nom Stories 7.10 Nerds & Monsters** (R) **7.20 Nerds & Monsters** (R) **7.30 The Tom and Jerry Show** (R) **7.40 The Tom and Jerry Show** (R) **7.45 Mr Bean: The Animated Series** (R) **8.00 Mr Bean: The Animated Series** (R) **8.10 Horrid Henry** (R) **8.25 Make It Pop** (R) **8.55 Scrambled! Christmas Stocking** (R) **9.25 Save Money: Good Food** (R) **9.55 FILM: Jack Frost (1998)** ★ **11.50 Catchphrase Christmas Special** (R) **12.45 ITV News and Weather;** Weather. **12.55 FILM: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002)** ★★★

CH4

Child Genius vs Celebrities Christmas Special, on at 8.00pm

7.00 FILM: The Rugrats in Paris: The Movie (2000) Animated adventure, with the voice of Christine Cavanaugh. ★★★ **8.15 The Big Bang Theory** (R) **8.40 The Big Bang Theory** (R) **9.05 Jamie's Quick & Easy Food** (R) **9.40 Christmas Brunch** With guests Anton Du Beke, Danny Mac and Tom Fletcher. **12.40 Paul Hollywood: A Baker's Life** Paul shares his favourite Mediterranean recipes on a trip to Cyprus. Last in the series. (R) **1.10 Jamie's Italian Christmas** Jamie Oliver cooks a festive meal with an Italian twist. (R) **2.10 The Simpsons** A corporation buys Springfield Elementary School. (R) **2.40 The Simpsons** An adult Bart and Lisa return home for Christmas with their parents. (R)

CH5

Last in the series, The Yorkshire Vet at Christmas, on at 8.00pm

6.00 Milkshake! 9.20 FILM: Gone with the Wind (1939) A plantation heiress has a tumultuous relationship with a roguish Southern gentleman during the American Civil War. Epic romantic drama, starring Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable. ★★★★ **1.35 FILM: Oklahoma! (1955)** A farm girl is torn between two suitors, a charming cowboy and a grim, brooding farmhand. Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical Western, starring Gordon MacRae and Shirley Jones. ★★★

Early View

Prime Time

3.55 Doodlebugs
4.10 Home (2015) ★★★
5.35 BBC News
5.50 Midlands Today; Weather
6.00 Countryfile
7.00 Mary, Mel and Sue's Big Christmas Thank You Mary Berry, Mel Giedroyc and Sue Perkins prepare a festive surprise for volunteers at a community centre that has been a focal point for a struggling South Wales town.
8.00 EastEnders Lauren and Abi make their feelings clear to Max, Karen confronts her children about the stolen phones and Mick tells Phil he wants nothing more to do with the job.
8.30 Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show The comedy star concludes his entertainment showcase with a festive special, featuring performances by soul singer Seal and comedian Bill Bailey.
9.35 Not Going Out Christmas Special Lee buys the perfect Christmas present for his children, but the kids' grandparents have the same idea, leaving him on a race against time to find an alternative.
10.15 BBC News; Weather.
10.30 The Vicar of Dibley The villagers celebrate Christmas, and vicar Geraldine learns there is a heavy price to be paid for festive kindness when she agrees to attend three slap-up lunches. (R)
11.15 The Two Ronnies Sketchbook (R)
11.45 Midnight Mass from Leeds Cathedral The traditional Christmas Eve service from St Anne's Roman Catholic Cathedral. Featuring the Leeds Cathedral Choir and Leeds Trinity Cathedral Boys' and Girls' Choirs.
1.00 FILM: Great Expectations (2012) ★★★

3.20 Guys and Dolls (1955) Musical, starring Frank Sinatra and Marlon Brando. ★★★★
5.45 Carols from King's The annual service from King's College, Cambridge.
7.00 Dad's Army Mainwaring's men face the might of a rival platoon in a battle to prove their worth. Arthur Lowe and John Le Mesurier play the superannuated soldiers. (R)
8.00 Christmas University Challenge 2017 New series. Jeremy Paxman presents the first round, featuring famous alumni from Durham University and Keble College, Oxford, competing for a place in the semi-finals.
8.30 Winter's Weirdest Events Chris Packham explores unusual and unexplained natural events that occur around the world during winter, from tornadoes made of snow to penguins attempting death-defying feats.
9.30 The Great Gatsby (2013) Premiere. A naive writer befriends a decadent millionaire and slowly uncovers the dark underside of his lavish lifestyle. Period drama, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire. ★★★
11.55 Christmas TOTP2 Special Mark Radcliffe presents festive performances from the Top of the Pops archive, including classics by Slade, Wham!, Wizzard, East 17, Mud, the Jackson 5 and Johnny Mathis. (R)
1.25 FILM: Whitney: Can I Be Me (2017) The life story of Whitney Houston, who died in 2012 aged 48. ★★★ **3.05 Sign Zone: Holby City** Morven is torn between her past and her future. Last in the series. (R) **4.05 This Is BBC Two** Preview of upcoming programmes from BBC Two.

4.00 Cannonball Christmas Special Festive edition of the water-based obstacle course challenge, hosted by Andrew Flintoff.
5.00 You've Been Framed! Unwrapped Harry Hill narrates festive-themed clips. (R)
5.30 ITV News Central; Weather.
5.35 ITV News and Weather
5.50 A Christmas Chase: Celebrity Special With Patti Clare, Matt Richardson, Kirsty Wark and Jimmy Osmond.
6.40 All Star Musicals Andrew Flintoff and Michael Crawford present a show in which seven famous faces each perform a song from a famous musical in front of a packed house at the London Palladium.
8.30 Maigret in Montmartre The detective investigates the seemingly random murders of a countess and a showgirl – and discovers an unexpected connection between the two victims' past experiences.
10.25 ITV News and Weather; Weather.
10.45 A Night for the Emergency Services Members of the emergency services team show off their performance skills, teaming up with the likes of Diversity, Leona Lewis, Michael Ball and Alfie Boe, and Tokio Myers. (R)
11.45 Christmas Carols on ITV Alfie Boe introduces a traditional Christmas Eve carol service, featuring Nadine Coyle, Alexander O'Neal, Howard Hewett, Alexis French, Ruthie Henshall and Natasha Barnes.
12.45 FILM: Casino Royale (1967) Spoof James Bond adventure, starring David Niven. ★ **3.00 ITV Nightscreen 5.00 The Aquabats! Super Show!** (R) **5.25 Make It Pop** (R) **5.45 Mr Bean: The Animated Series** (R)

3.05 The Simpsons (R)
3.35 The Borrowers (1997) Children's fantasy, starring John Goodman. ★★★
5.20 The Snowman Animated adventure, based on Raymond Briggs' festive tale. (R)
5.55 The Snowman and the Snowdog (R)
6.20 Channel 4 News
6.30 The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992) Puppet comedy, starring Michael Caine. ★★★
8.00 Child Genius vs Celebrities Christmas Special Richard Osman hosts a Christmas special in which past competitors return to take on a team of celebrities comprising Rob Delaney, Cathy Newman, Dom Joly and Janet Street-Porter.
9.00 Gogglebox 2017 Highlights from the most recent series, featuring the armchair critics' reactions to The Crystal Maze, the Weakest Link Celebrity Special, and Mary Berry's Country House Secrets.
11.05 The Inbetweeners The friends decide to play truant from sixth form and buy alcohol for an all-day drinking session, which is interrupted when Neil's father comes home early. (R)
11.35 The Inbetweeners The gang goes on the infamous sociology and geography field trip to Swanage, and Will takes a shine to new girl Lauren – but she is only interested in Simon. (R)
12.10 The Inbetweeners (R) **12.40 The Inbetweeners** (R) **1.05 The Inbetweeners** (R) **1.35 Man Down Christmas Special** (R) **2.00 The Last Leg Christmas Special** (R) **2.55 The Crystal Maze: Celebrity Special** (R) **3.50 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA** (R) **4.40 Location, Location, Location** (R) **5.35 Four in a Bed** (R)

4.15 Scrooge – A Christmas Carol (1951) (b/w) ★★★★
6.00 Agatha Christie's Crooked House (R)
7.00 5 News Update The latest headlines, sport and weather.
7.05 Agatha Christie's Crooked House Adaptation of the mystery novel, starring Max Irons and Terence Stamp. A man returning to London from Cairo investigates the poisoning of his fiancee's grandfather. (R)
8.00 The Yorkshire Vet at Christmas Peter Wright is called to an emergency at John Swales' farm, where one of his prize-winning Limousins is struggling to give birth. Last in the series.
9.00 André Rieu: My Life in Music Profile of the violinist, examining his upbringing in the Netherlands, early musical influences, and the bold moves that have made him one of classical music's biggest stars.
10.20 Andre Rieu: Christmas in London A festive concert by the Dutch violinist and the Johann Strauss Orchestra, featuring carols as well as songs including Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah and the Concierto de Aranjuez. (R)
11.30 An Audience with Donny & Marie The Osmond siblings entertain a celebrity audience in a programme based on their Las Vegas stage show, featuring old favourites and songs from their 2009 Donny & Marie album. (R)
12.35 Lip Sync Battle UK: Rufus Hound v Jorgie Porter (R) **1.00 SuperCasino 3.05 Love/Hate** (R) **4.00 My Mum's Hotter Than Me!** (R) **4.50 House Doctor** (R) **5.15 Access 5.20 Wildlife SOS** (R) **5.45 Chinese Food in Minutes** (R)

Late View

Christmas Day

BBC 1

Jenny Agutter stars, Call the Midwife, on at 7.40pm

Early View

6.00 Breakfast News, entertainment and weather reports. **9.00 CBeebies' The Snow Queen** Stage musical adaptation of the tale by Hans Christian Andersen. **9.45 Go Jetters. 10.00 Christmas Morning from All Saints Fulham** A live service led by the Rev Penny Seabrook. **11.00 The Madagascar Penguins in a Christmas Caper** (R) **11.10 Snow Chick: A Penguin's Tale** Following the first months in the life of an emperor penguin. (R) **12.10 BBC News;** Weather. **12.20 Top of the Pops Christmas Special** With performances by Ed Sheeran, Dua Lipa, Clean Bandit, Rita Ora and the Script. **1.20 FILM: Toy Story 3 (2010)** Animated adventure, with the voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen. ★★★★

Prime Time

3.00 The Queen's Christmas Broadcast
3.10 Cinderella (2015) ★★★
4.45 The Highway Rat
5.15 BBC News; Weather.
5.30 Doctor Who
6.30 Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special
7.40 Call the Midwife Boxing Day sees heavy snowfall covering the country and the adverse weather causes major disruption across Poplar as roads become blocked and pipes freeze.
9.00 EastEnders Things are set to explode for Max as Stacey's phone – with all Jane's incriminating voicemails – is returned to her. Mick discovers the hard way not to cross Aidan Maguire.
10.00 Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special First of two festive specials. Grandad is convinced the house is haunted, Cathy has an internet date and Rory hopes to improve his looks by undergoing plastic surgery.
10.35 300 Years of French & Saunders Comedy double act Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders mark the 30th anniversary of their eponymous sketch show, which ran for six series up until 2007.
11.25 BBC News; Weather.
11.40 On Christmas Night Colin Salmon reads Luke's account of the angels appearing to shepherds in the fields above Bethlehem to proclaim the joyful news of the birth of Christ.
11.45 Have I Got a Bit More 2017 News for You An extended compilation of memorable moments from the satirical quiz over the past year, with a variety of guest hosts and panellists joining captains Paul Merton and Ian Hislop.

Late View

12.30 Darcey Bussell: Looking for Fred Astaire (R) **1.30 Weather for the Week Ahead 1.35 BBC News**

BBC 2

David Mitchell stars in the comedy, Upstart Crow, on at 8.25pm

6.10 The Hairy Bikers Home for Christmas With the Rev Kate Bottley and Jon Culshaw. (R) **7.10 Island Parish Shetland** (R) **7.40 FILM: Bee Movie (2007)** Animated comedy, with the voice of Jerry Seinfeld. ★★★ **9.00 The Big Family Cooking Showdown** Families from Wiltshire and Birmingham compete. (R) **10.00 Harry Potter: A History of Magic** (R) **11.00 Carols from King's** The annual service from King's College, Cambridge. (R) **12.15 FILM: The Importance of Being Earnest (2002)** Oscar Wilde comedy, starring Rupert Everett and Colin Firth. ★★★ **1.40 BBC Proms 2017: Oklahoma!** Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical Oklahoma!

4.30 Dame Vera Lynn: Happy 100th Birthday (R)
5.30 Sign Zone: The Queen's Christmas Broadcast (R)
5.35 The Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show (R)
6.45 Winter's Weirdest Events (R)
7.45 Dad's Army Frazer is unable to hide his delight when Captain Mainwaring's disreputable brother gatecrashes a sherry party for local dignitaries. Classic comedy, starring Arthur Lowe. (R)
8.25 Upstart Crow Will's new play is to be performed at the queen's Christmas festivities, while the Shakespeares find themselves with some uninvited guests. Emma Thompson guest stars as Elizabeth I.
9.00 Tom Jones & Beverley Knight's Gospel Christmas Tom Jones and Beverley Knight host a festive concert from Cardiff featuring a blend of traditional gospel, carols and songs of spiritual intent by greats like Prince and Bob Dylan. First shown on BBC One Wales.
10.00 Judi Dench: All the World's Her Stage Billy Connolly, Samantha Bond, Daniel Craig and Ian McKellen are among those reminiscing about the veteran actress in this celebration of her 60-year career. (R)
11.05 Mrs Henderson Presents (2005) A widow invests her fortune in an abandoned London theatre and defies censorship laws to stage a controversial nude revue. Fact-based comedy drama, with Judi Dench. ★★★

12.45 FILM: My Week with Marilyn (2011) ★★★ **2.15 This Is BBC Two**

ITV

Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs at Christmas, on at 7.00pm

6.00 CITV: Sooty. (R) **6.10 Oddbods** (R) **6.15 Om Nom Stories** (R) **6.20 Signed Stories: Share a Story** (R) **6.25 Almost Naked Animals** (R) **6.35 Horrid Henry** (R) **6.50 Horrid Henry** (R) **7.05 Horrid Henry** (R) **7.20 Horrid Henry** (R) **7.30 Scrambled!: Scrambled! Christmas Special 7.35 Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show** (R) **7.50 Scrambled!: The Bagel and Becky Show** (R) **8.10 Scrambled!: Teen Titans Go!** (R) **8.30 Scrambled!: Be Cool, Scooby-Doo!** (R) **9.05 Scrambled!: Wishfart** (R) **9.25 FILM: National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989)** ★★★ **11.10 FILM: Mr Bean's Holiday (2007)** ★ **12.50 FILM: Santa Claus: The Movie (1985)** ★★

3.00 The Queen Her Majesty's annual address.
3.10 Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (2004) The teenage wizard is alarmed to learn a dangerous fugitive sorcerer is searching for him. The third in the fantasy adventure series, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Gary Oldman. ★★★
5.50 Emmerdale Robert gets a taste of how different his life could be.
6.50 ITV News and Weather
7.00 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs at Christmas Paul follows the work of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home over the festive period, hoping to find a home for a heavily pregnant stray found wet and bedraggled on Hampstead Heath.
8.00 Coronation Street Peter threatens to kill Billy, Carla's surprise arrival annoys Aidan, Daniel finds Tracy sneaking Steve out of Number 1, and Brian is arrested.
9.00 Victoria The queen and Prince Albert have very different expectations for a family Christmas and the arrival of guests at the palace causes further tension. Starring Jenna Coleman.
11.00 ITV News and Weather
11.15 The Holiday (2006) Two single women from opposite sides of the Atlantic find love after they swap houses over Christmas. Romantic comedy, with Cameron Diaz. ★★

1.45 FILM: The Dam Busters (1954) An engineer designs an ingenious bouncing bomb to destroy major dams in Germany's industrial heartland. Fact-based Second World War drama, with Michael Redgrave and Richard Todd. (b/w) ★★★★ **3.50 ITV Nightscreen**

Ch4

The restaurant hosts a festive party, First Dates at Christmas, 9.00pm

6.00 FILM: Rugrats Go Wild (2003) ★★ **7.20 The Bear** (R) **7.45 Prep & Landing: Naughty vs Nice** (R) **8.10 Prep & Landing** (R) **8.40 Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas** (R) **9.05 The Simpsons** (R) **9.35 The Simpsons** (R) **10.05 The Simpsons** (R) **10.35 The Simpsons** (R) **11.05 FILM: Dr Seuss' The Lorax (2012)** ★★★ **12.45 The Snowman** Animated adventure, based on Raymond Briggs' festive tale. (R) **1.20 The Snowman and the Snowdog** Animated sequel to classic festive tale The Snowman. (R) **1.55 Father Christmas** (R) **2.25 Channel 4 News 2.30 The Alternative Christmas Message 2.35 FILM: Scrooged (1988)** Christmas comedy, starring Bill Murray. ★★★

4.30 Dumbo (1941) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Edward Brophy. ★★★★
5.50 Home Alone (1990) Family comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin. ★★★
7.40 The Great Christmas Bake Off Part one of two. Former contestants Paul Jagger, Beca Lyne-Pirkis, Selasi Gbormittah and Val Stones face three festive challenges in a bid to win the Christmas Star Baker title.
9.00 First Dates at Christmas The restaurant hosts a festive party as maitre d' Fred and his Christmas Cupids celebrate a year that has seen proposals, engagement rings and the show's very first baby.
10.00 Alan Carr's Christmas Chatty Man With guests Noel Gallagher, Christian Slater, John Bishop, Lorraine Kelly, Rob Beckett and Gogglebox stars Giles and Mary. Plus, music by Kasabian, Adam Lambert and Dua Lipa.

12.00 George Michael: Freedom The singer-songwriter narrates a documentary charting his life and career, focusing on the period around the release of his 1990 album Listen without Prejudice Vol 1. (R) **1.40 George Michael: Live in London** Footage from the singer-songwriter's two shows at London's Earls Court in August 2008. (R) **2.45 The Crystal Maze** A team of fast-food workers tackles the zones. (R) **3.40 Location, Location, Location** Kirstie Allsopp and Phil Spencer revisit property-hunters in London. (R) **4.35 Four in a Bed** The competitors are invited to Grassington Lodge in North Yorkshire. (R) **5.00 Kirstie's Handmade Christmas** Kirstie Allsopp showcases some of the best Christmas cakes. (R) **5.20 FILM: Moomins on the Riviera (2014)** Premiere. Children's animation, with the voice of Russell Tovey. ★★★

Ch5

Britain's Best Loved Double Acts: Christmas Special, on at 10.55pm

6.00 Milkshake! 8.55 FILM: Scrooge (1970) A miserly man is taught the error of his ways by a host of spectral visitors. Musical adaptation of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, starring Albert Finney and Alec Guinness. ★★★ **11.05 FILM: Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (1954)** A cowboy decides to get married, prompting his six hellraising brothers to kidnap brides for themselves. Stanley Donen's musical Western, starring Howard Keel and Jane Powell. ★★★★ **1.05 FILM: Singin' in the Rain (1952)** A silent-movie star tries to win the heart of an aspiring actress as the dawn of sound changes the film business for ever. Musical comedy, starring Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds. ★★★★

3.10 Oliver! (1968) Musical, starring Ron Moody. ★★★★
6.00 Elf: The Musical West End star Ben Forster is Buddy, the human child raised as one of Santa's elves in this musical stage adaptation of the hit 2003 festive film of the same name. (R)
9.00 The Morecambe and Wise Story: Look Back in Laughter Documentary making use of old performances, chat show appearances and archive interviews to shed light on the successful comedy careers of Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise. (R)
10.55 Britain's Best Loved Double Acts: Christmas Special Festive fun featuring some of the greatest double acts on the small screen, including Morecambe and Wise, French and Saunders, the Two Ronnies, Ant and Dec, and Cannon and Ball. (R)
11.55 Steptoe and Son (1972) Harold marries a stripper – but makes the mistake of letting Albert tag along on the honeymoon. Comedy based on the TV series, starring Harry H Corbett and Wilfrid Brambell. ★★★

1.45 SuperCasino Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.05 Love/Hate** John Boy believes Stumpy has become an informant after the gardai raid one of his drug factories, and orders Darren to exact a violent revenge. (R) **4.00 Now That's Funny!** A collection of internet-sourced videos with a family friendly hook, featuring people who crash weddings, sporting fails and flops, and science experiments. (R) **4.45 House Doctor** Home improvement highlights from the series. (R) **5.10 House Busters** (R) **5.35 Wildlife SOS** (R)

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Boxing Day

BBC 1

Documentary following polar bears, Snow Bears, on at 6.30pm

Early View

6.00 Breakfast News, entertainment and weather reports. **9.00 FILM: Tinker Bell and the Legend of the NeverBeast (2014)** ★★★ **10.10 FILM: Planes: Fire & Rescue (2014)** Premiere. Animated adventure sequel, with the voice of Dane Cook. ★★★ **11.25 Mary, Mel and Sue's Big Christmas Thank You** (R) **12.25 BBC News;** Weather. **12.35 Midlands Today; Weather 12.45 Judi Dench: My Passion for Trees** The actress discovers how trees are a part of Britain's history. (R) **1.45 Stick Man** Animated adaptation of Julia Donaldson's children's book. (R) **2.10 FILM: Shaun the Sheep Movie (2015)** Premiere. Animation, featuring the voice of Justin Fletcher. ★★★★

Prime Time

3.30 Doodlebugs Sketch show in which inanimate objects talk.

3.45 Mary Poppins (1964) Disney musical fantasy, with Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke. ★★★★

6.00 BBC News at Six; Weather

6.20 Midlands Today; Weather

6.30 Snow Bears Documentary following polar bears and their cubs as they travel 400 miles to reach the North Pole as spring sets in, encountering other Arctic wildlife along the way.

7.30 EastEnders Life for the Brannings will never be the same again as the horror of what has happened unfolds – but it soon becomes clear Max's actions have even wider repercussions.

8.00 Little Women New series. Heidi Thomas's adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's 19th-century American coming-of-age tale begins as the four March sisters contemplate a Christmas without their father.

9.00 The Miniaturist Two-part adaptation of Jessie Burton's best-selling novel set in 1686, following 18-year-old Nella Oortman as she begins a new life in Amsterdam as the wife of a wealthy merchant.

10.30 BBC News; Weather; National Lottery Update

10.45 Match of the Day Gary Lineker presents highlights of the latest Premier League matches, including Bournemouth v West Ham United, Huddersfield Town v Stoke City, and West Bromwich Albion v Everton.

Late View

12.15 Stacey Dooley in the USA (R) **1.15 Weather for the Week Ahead 1.20 BBC News**

BBC 2

New series, Two Doors Down - Christmas Special, on at 10.30pm

6.15 Sign Zone: Celebrity Antiques Road Trip Strictly Come Dancing 2016 champions Ore Oduba and Joanne Clifton compete. (R) **7.15 Island Parish Shetland** (R) **7.45 FILM: Chimpanzee (2012)** Premiere. Documentary following an orphaned chimpanzee. ★★★ **8.55 The Big Family Cooking Showdown** (R) **9.55 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **10.25 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **10.55 The Sweet Makers: A Tudor Treat** (R) **11.55 FILM: A Hard Day's Night (1964)** Musical comedy, starring the Beatles. (b/w) ★★★★ **1.20 FILM: The Eagle Has Landed (1976)** Second World War spy adventure, with Michael Caine. ★★★

3.30 The Repair Shop at Christmas (R)

4.30 Final Score

5.35 Matthew Bourne's Cinderella

7.30 Christmas University Challenge 2017 Selwyn College, Cambridge, featuring writer Robin French, take on St Andrews University, with BBC Scotland Political Editor Brian Taylor hoping for victory. Jeremy Paxman hosts.

8.00 Reindeer Family & Me Gordon Buchanan goes to live with a family from the nomadic Sami culture in Finnish Lapland, and undertakes a journey across the frozen wilderness with the help of a reindeer.

9.00 Dragons' Den A serial entrepreneur pitches his online greeting card business, and a Surrey-based inventor hopes his word game could become a family Christmas favourite.

10.00 QI Sandi Toksvig hosts the festive edition with Jason Manford, Romesh Ranganathan, Holly Walsh and Alan Davies answering the questions.

10.30 Two Doors Down – Christmas Special New series. Beth and Eric's plans for a quiet festive feast are thwarted when Cathy and Colin's flight to the French Alps is cancelled, and Christine also turns up with her granddaughter.

11.00 Joanna & Jennifer: Absolutely Champers Absolutely Fabulous duo Joanna Lumley and Jennifer Saunders explore the Champagne region of north eastern France to find out how their characters' favourite tipple is made. (R)

12.00 Saturday Night Fever – The Ultimate Disco Movie (R) **1.10 Tom Jones & Beverley Knight's Gospel Christmas** (R)

ITV

Festive edition, Birds of a Feather Christmas Special, 10.15pm

6.00 CITV: Sooty. (R) **6.10 Oddbods** (R) **6.15 Om Nom Stories** (R) **6.20 Signed Stories: Share a Story** (R) **6.25 Almost Naked Animals** (R) **6.35 Nerds & Monsters** (R) **6.50 Nerds & Monsters** (R) **7.05 Horrid Henry** (R) **7.20 Wishfart** (R) **7.30 Scrambled!: Scrambled! Christmas Special 7.35 Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show** (R) **7.50 Scrambled!: The Bagel and Becky Show** (R) **8.10 Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls** (R) **8.30 FILM: Scrambled!: Scooby-Doo! Haunted Holidays (2012)** ★★★ **9.05 Scrambled!: Horrid Henry** (R) **9.25 FILM: Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)** ★★★★ **11.25 FILM: Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore (2010)** ★ **1.00 ITV Racing: Live from Kempton**

3.30 E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982) Sci-fi fantasy, with Henry Thomas. ★★★★

5.50 ITV News and Weather

6.10 Emmerdale Diane comforts Robert as he crumbles after reading a thank you card for Seb's presents, and watching from the shadows, Rebecca is struck by his emotion.

6.40 Jurassic World (2015) Premiere. A safari park for genetically engineered dinosaurs creates a new species – but it quickly escapes to terrorise the tourists. Action adventure sequel, with Chris Pratt. ★★★

9.00 Coronation Street Eileen keeps vigil over a comatose Billy while worrying about a missing Todd, Daniel finds Adam semi-conscious, and Carla begs Roy not to reveal her secret.

10.00 ITV News and Weather

10.15 Birds of a Feather Christmas Special Tracey's plans could upset the festive harmony, Sharon finds a novel way of doing her Christmas shopping and Dorien has a mystery to solve. Comedy, starring Pauline Quirke. (R)

11.15 The Keith and Paddy Picture Show Keith Lemon and Paddy McGuinness enlist the aid of Will Mellor, Robbie Williams, Sarah Parish, Emma Willis and Chris Kamara and others as they remake the 1984 classic Ghostbusters. (R)

11.45 Al Murray's Make Christmas Great Again Philosopher, common sense commando, scholar, sage and bald bloke The Pub Landlord arranges a lock-in with a celebrity guest audience for a lively mix of music and chat. (R)

12.45 Jackpot247 3.00 Tenable (R) **3.50 ITV Nightscreen 5.05 The Jeremy Kyle Show** (R)

CH4

The family recalls stories about disasters at sea, The Simpsons, 10.25am

6.40 FILM: Song of the Sea (2014) Animated fantasy, with the voice of Lucy O'Connell. ★★★★ **8.25 FILM: Short Circuit (1986)** Sci-fi comedy adventure, starring Steve Guttenberg. ★★★ **10.25 The Simpsons** The family recalls stories about disasters at sea. (R) **10.50 The Simpsons** A department store Santa grants Lisa's Christmas wish. (R) **11.15 The Simpsons** (R) **11.40 The Simpsons** Marge loses all memory of Homer. (R) **12.10 FILM: Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (2009)** Comedy, starring Zachary Levi. ★★ **1.55 Channel 4 News** Including sport and weather. **2.00 Child Genius vs Celebrities Christmas Special** Past competitors return to take on a team of celebrities. (R)

3.05 The Great Christmas Bake Off Part one of two. Former contestants compete in a series of festive challenges. (R)

4.20 The Little Mermaid (1989) Animated adventure, with the voice of Jodi Benson. ★★★★

6.00 Back to the Future (1985) A teenager travels back in time and gets stuck in the 1950s – where he has to make sure his parents fall in love. Sci-fi comedy adventure, with Michael J Fox and Christopher Lloyd. ★★★★

8.00 Travel Man: 48 Hours in Hong Kong Richard Ayoade is joined by actor Jon Hamm, star of Mad Men and Baby Driver, for a Yuletide trek around Hong Kong – the most visited and most vertical city on the planet.

9.00 Big Fat Quiz of the Year 2017 Jimmy Carr hosts a comedy quiz looking back at the past 12 months, with panellists Richard Ayoade, Noel Fielding, David Mitchell, Big Narstie, Roisin Conaty and Katherine Ryan.

11.10 Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) A man's misfortunes in love look set to change when he meets an American beauty at a wedding. Richard Curtis's romantic comedy, starring Hugh Grant, Andie MacDowell and John Hannah. ★★★★

1.20 The Inbetweeners (R) **1.50 The Inbetweeners** (R) **2.15 The Inbetweeners** (R) **2.45 The Inbetweeners** (R) **3.10 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA** (R) **4.00 Location, Location, Location** (R) **4.55 Kirstie's Handmade Christmas** (R) **5.10 FILM: Moshi Monsters: The Movie (2013)** Animated adventure, with the voice of Emma Tate. ★★★

CH5

The Strictly Story: Fake Tan, Tangos & a 10 from Len, on at 7.00pm

6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 Access 9.25 Pets Make You Laugh Out Loud Clips of foul-mouthed parrots and a water-skiing squirrel. (R) **10.00 FILM: Titanic (1953)** An aristocrat trying to stop his wife and children leaving him finds them on board the ill-fated ship. Drama, with Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck. (b/w) ★★★ **11.50 FILM: Chariots of Fire (1981)** Oscar-winning drama based on the true story of British runners Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams, going for gold at the 1924 Olympics in Paris. ★★★★ **2.10 Balmoral: A Hidden History** Documentary offering a behind-scenes look at the secluded royal retreat that covers 50,000 acres of the Scottish Highlands, and is Queen Elizabeth's favourite home. (R)

4.10 Sandringham: The Queen At Christmas What Christmas is like for the Royal Family on the Sandringham Estate.

5.15 A Royal Night Out (2015) Premiere. Comedy drama, starring Bel Powley and Sarah Gadon. ★★★

7.00 The Strictly Story: Fake Tan, Tangos & a 10 from Len The tale behind the popular celebrity dance contest, featuring contributions from popular past contestants as well as the show's judges and professional dancers and celebrity fans. (R)

8.30 Dirty Dancing: Making Movie Magic A 30th anniversary celebration of the movie phenomenon, revisiting favourite scenes, discovering what happened on set and hearing from the supporting cast and crew. (R)

10.00 Dirty Dancing (1987) A dance instructor at a 1960s resort teaches a naive teenager about self-expression as they perform in an important show. Romantic drama, with Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey. ★★★

12.00 Football on 5: The Championship Colin Murray introduces action from the Boxing Day games. **12.55 Aviva Premiership Rugby Highlights** Highlights from the 11th round of matches. **1.45 SuperCasino** Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.05 Love/Hate** John Boy's deceit sparks a gang war. (R) **4.00 Now That's Funny!** Internet-sourced videos with an amusing family friendly hook. (R) **4.45 House Doctor** Highlights of the series. (R) **5.10 House Busters** A south London home. (R) **5.35 Wildlife SOS** (R)

Wednesday, December 27

BBC 1

Anya Taylor-Joy stars in The Miniaturist, on at 9.00pm

6.00 Breakfast News, entertainment and weather reports. **7.45 Match of the Day** Gary Lineker presents highlights of the latest Premier League matches. (R) **9.15 FILM: Turbo (2013)** Animated adventure, with the voice of Ryan Reynolds. ★★★ **10.45 FILM: The Princess and the Frog (2009)** ★★★ **12.15 Snow Bears** Documentary following polar bears travelling to the North Pole. (R) **1.15 BBC News** The latest national and international stories. **1.25 Midlands Today; Weather 1.35 Father Brown** Sid falls for the heiress to a local brewery. (R) **2.20 FILM: Shrek 2 (2004)** Animated adventure sequel, with the voice of Mike Myers. ★★★

BBC 2

Documentary about the early years, Oasis: Supersonic, 10.00pm

6.25 Sign Zone: Mary Berry's Country House Secrets Mary visits the March family at Goodwood House. (R) **7.25 Island Parish Shetland** (R) **7.55 FILM: Bears (2014)** Premiere. Documentary following a family of bears in Alaska. ★★★ **9.10 The Big Family Cooking Showdown** (R) **10.10 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **10.40 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **11.10 The Sweet Makers: A Georgian Treat** (R) **12.10 FILM: The Red Shoes (1948)** Powell and Pressburger's drama, starring Moira Shearer. ★★★★ **2.20 The World's Most Extraordinary Homes** Unusual homes built in mountainous regions of the world. (R)

ITV

Neil Dudgeon stars, Midsomer Murders, 1.00pm

6.00 CITV: Sooty. (R) **6.10 The Oddbods Show** (R) **6.15 Om Nom Stories** (R) **6.20 Super 4** (R) **6.35 Super 4** (R) **6.45 Mr Bean: The Animated Series** (R) **7.00 Mr Bean: The Animated Series** (R) **7.10 Horrid Henry** (R) **7.25 FILM: K-9 (1989)** Police comedy, starring James Belushi. ★★ **9.25 FILM: Twins (1988)** Comedy, with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito. ★★★ **11.25 Cannonball Christmas Special** (R) **12.25 You've Been Framed!** Judy Murray toughens up Andy by using him for target practice. **12.55 ITV Lunchtime News;** Weather. **12.58 Central News and Weather 1.00 Midsomer Murders** A man is stabbed to death during a ghost-hunting party. (R)

Ch4

Professor Noel treats a poorly penguin, The Supervet, on at 7.00pm

6.40 FILM: Short Circuit 2 (1988) A curious robot meets an old friend and sets off for an adventure in New York. Sci-fi comedy sequel, starring Fisher Stevens, with the voice of Tim Blaney. ★★ **8.40 Lego Masters** The hunt is on for the UK and Ireland's best Lego builders. (R) **9.40 The Simpsons** With the voice of Frances McDormand. (R) **10.10 The Simpsons** Groundskeeper Willie is forced to move in with the family. (R) **10.35 The Simpsons** Grampa becomes a matador. (R) **11.05 FILM: Small Soldiers (1998)** A computer chip brings a squad of toy soldiers to life, causing mayhem for their owner. Children's adventure, with Kirsten Dunst. ★★★ **1.15 FILM: Sunshine on Leith (2013)** Musical, starring George MacKay. ★★

Ch5

Most Shocking Celebrity Moments 2017, on at 9.00pm

6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 Cruising with Jane McDonald The presenter embarks on a series of ocean odysseys. (R) **9.30 World's Strongest Man 2017** Highlights of the World Tour Finals. **10.30 FILM: North Sea Hijack (1979)** Thriller, starring Roger Moore. ★★ **12.25 FILM: Operation Crossbow (1965)** Three engineers parachute into occupied Holland to destroy a missile base – but there is a traitor in their midst. Second World War adventure, with George Peppard and Sophia Loren. ★★★ **2.40 FILM: Operation: Daybreak (1975)** Fact-based Second World War drama about the killing of leading Nazi Reinhard Heydrich and the search for the assassins. Starring Timothy Bottoms. ★★★

Early View

Prime Time

3.45 The Gruffalo (R)
4.10 Big Hero 6 (2014) ★★★
5.45 Pointless (R)
6.30 BBC News
6.50 Midlands Today; Weather
7.00 Celebrity Mastermind New series. John Humphrys presents the first in a new series of the classic quiz show, as Jack Ashton, Rich Hall, Guy Mowbray and Pam Ayres face the famous black chair.
7.30 A Question of Sport: Premier League Special Sue Barker asks the questions in the light-hearted quiz, with Dion Dublin, Graeme Le Saux, Darren Bent and Alex Scott joining team captains Matt Dawson and Phil Tufnell.
8.00 Little Women The March sisters must fend for themselves at home as Marmee is preoccupied with caring for her ailing husband, but the girls face an insurmountable challenge as Beth falls ill.
9.00 The Miniaturist Two-part adaptation of Jessie Burton's best-selling novel, set in 1686. In the second episode, Nella desperately tries to turn the fortunes of the Brandt household around.
10.00 BBC News at Ten
10.20 Midlands Today; Weather; National Lottery Update
10.30 Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special (R)
11.00 Not Going Out Christmas Special (R)
11.40 Comic Relief 2017: 'Twas the Thanks After Red Nose Day A compilation looking back at some of the highlights from the 2017 Comic Relief fundraising event, featuring a host of celebrities appearances and comedic routines.
12.40 Weather for the Week Ahead 12.45 BBC News

3.20 Inside the Factory (R)
4.20 The Man Who Never Was (1956) ★★
6.00 Thailand: Earth's Tropical Paradise (R)
7.00 Dad's Army Mainwaring finds himself bidding against Pike for an orange at a fundraising bazaar, but the private reveals a stubborn streak that costs the captain dear. (R)
7.30 Christmas University Challenge 2017 In the third match of the Christmas series, teams of university alumni from the University of York and University of Southampton compete.
8.00 Six Robots & Us A unique experiment exploring the latest innovations in robotics, to examine how useful robots can be in enhancing the lives of ordinary families.
9.00 Alan Partridge: Why, When, Where, How and Whom? Documentary celebrating 25 years of Steve Coogan's comic creation, featuring contributions from writers and co-stars and previously unseen rehearsal and improv footage.
10.00 Oasis: Supersonic (2016) Premiere. Documentary about the early years of the Manchester band, featuring concert footage and first-hand accounts of the sibling rivalry between Noel and Liam Gallagher. ★★★
11.55 NFL This Week Action from the 16th round of fixtures, which included Green Bay Packers v Minnesota Vikings, New Orleans Saints v Atlanta Falcons, and Philadelphia Eagles v Oakland Raiders.
12.45 Britpop at the BBC 1.45 Blur at Glastonbury (R) **2.45 Sign Zone: Joanna & Jennifer: Absolutely Champers** (R) **3.45 FILM: Sign Zone: Bill (2015)** ★★★

3.00 Tenable A team of five from Cornwall answers questions about top 10 lists. (R)
4.00 Tipping Point Game show, hosted by Ben Shephard. (R)
5.00 The Chase Quiz show, hosted by Bradley Walsh. (R)
6.00 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs The comedian returns to Battersea Dogs & Cats Home in London, meeting a British bulldog with a leg problem and helping to wash a smelly English mastiff. (R)
6.30 ITV News Central; Weather.
6.45 ITV Evening News; Weather.
7.00 Emmerdale Zak enlists Faith's help in faking the paperwork to save the Dingle home, while Liv is delighted to see that Aaron and Alex are together.
7.30 Coronation Street Eileen tries to find out more about Billy's fall, Adam vows to get justice for his mum's death, and Alya discovers why new clients do not want to meet with her.
8.00 Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2005) The teenage wizard is chosen to represent Hogwarts School in a dangerous magical tournament. Fourth instalment of the fantasy saga, starring Daniel Radcliffe and Robert Pattinson. ★★★
10.50 ITV Evening News; Weather.
11.04 ITV Central Weather
11.05 Tina & Bobby Drama about footballer Bobby Moore's life with his childhood sweetheart Tina Dean, from their humble beginnings to superstardom. (R)
12.05 Get Shirty (R) **12.55 Jackpot247 3.00 May the Best House Win** (R)

3.10 Four Rooms with Sarah Beeny
4.15 Channel 4 News
4.30 Back to the Future Part II (1989) ★★★
6.30 Hollyoaks
7.00 The Supervet at Christmas Noel Fitzpatrick is called upon to help a Humboldt penguin chick that needs surgery on its foot. He also treats a cat with a mysterious swelling and a husky has a hip operation. (R)
8.00 Supershoppers Sales Special Anna Richardson and Sabrina Grant offer money-saving tips, and investigate some of the slashed prices and discounts from retailers that may not be all they seem.
9.00 Miranda Does Christmas A Christmas special hosted by comedian Miranda Hart, featuring a unique gospel choir performance, and a festive version of a Destiny's Child classic.
10.00 First Dates at Christmas The restaurant hosts a festive party as maitre d' Fred and his Christmas Cupids celebrate a year that has seen proposals, engagement rings and the show's very first baby. (R)
11.05 East Is East (1999) Two Asian teenagers in 1970s Salford are horrified when their traditionally minded father plans arranged marriages for them. Comedy drama, starring Om Puri and Jimi Mistry. ★★★
12.50 Very British Problems at Christmas (R) **1.45 That's So Last Century** (R) **2.35 Britain's Favourite Superhero** (R) **4.00 Location, Location, Location** (R) **4.55 Four in a Bed** (R) **5.20 Kirstie's Handmade Christmas** (R) **5.40 FILM: Holiday Inn (1942)** (b/w) ★★★

4.55 The Guns of Navarone (1961) Second World War adventure, starring Gregory Peck; ★★★ 5 News Update
8.00 World's Strongest Man 2017 Action from the opening heat in Botswana, which featured four former winners including defending champion Brian Shaw – targeting a record-equalling fifth title; 5 News Update
9.00 Most Shocking Celebrity Moments 2017 Memorable moments featuring famous faces from the past year, including David Beckham's leaked e-mails, a mishap at the Oscars, and Prue Leith's Great British Bake Off spoilers.
12.00 Blind Date Christmas Special A festive edition of the matchmaking show, in which Paul O'Grady gives a real-life Prince Charming a chance to find romance with either Cinderella, Snow White or Tinkerbell. (R) **1.00 SuperCasino** Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.05 Love/Hate** Trish gives birth on Christmas Eve, while Darren is delighted when Rosie returns to Dublin. However, John Boy is still at war with Fran – and orders Tommy to kill his rival. (R) **4.00 Cruising with Jane McDonald** The singer embarks on a series of ocean odysseys, beginning with a stop-off at Nassau in the Bahamas, where Jane finds solace in the state's oldest baptist church. (R) **4.45 House Doctor** Ann Maurice and Alistair Appleton present more highlights from the series, recalling a basement flat in north London desperately in need of tidying up. (R) **5.10 House Busters** (R) **5.35 Wildlife SOS** The team treats an owl that refuses to fly and a badger with life-threatening injuries, while Simon tries to free a deer that has become stuck in railings. (R)

Late View

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Thursday, December 28

Early View

BBC 1

Granville faces being left alone at Christmas, Still Open All Hours, 7.30pm

6.00 Breakfast A round-up of national and international news, plus current affairs, arts and entertainment, and weather. **9.00 FILM: The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists! (2012)** Animated comedy, with the voice of Hugh Grant. ★★★ **10.20 FILM: Kung Fu Panda (2008)** Animated comedy, with the voice of Jack Black. ★★★ **11.45 Bargain Hunt** Two teams test their antiques knowledge. (R) **12.45 BBC News at One; Weather 1.00 Midlands Today; Weather 1.05 Father Brown** The clerical sleuth encounters a voodoo priest. (R) **1.50 Revolting Rhymes** Part one of two. (R) **2.20 FILM: Shrek the Third (2007)** Animated sequel, with the voice of Mike Myers. ★★★

BBC 2

Steve Coogan stars, Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa, on at 11.30pm

6.45 Sign Zone: MasterChef: The Professionals (R) **7.45 FILM: Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan (2011)** A tribute to the visual effects artist. ★★★ **9.15 The Big Family Cooking Showdown** (R) **10.15 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **10.45 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **11.15 The Sweet Makers: A Victorian Treat** (R) **12.15 FILM: Love Is a Many Splendored Thing (1955)** Fact-based romantic drama, with William Holden and Jennifer Jones. ★★ **1.55 Supercharged Otters: Natural World** Documentary following three orphaned river otters. (R) **2.55 The World's Most Extraordinary Homes** Unusual homes in forest regions around the world. (R)

ITV

Bradley Walsh hosts the quiz show, The Chase, on at 5.00pm

6.00 Good Morning Britain Shaun Williamson gives the lowdown on his appearance in Peter Pan, and Chris Packham talks about his dinosaur documentary The Real T. Rex. **8.30 Lorraine 9.25 FILM: Babe (1995)** A piglet dreams of being a champion sheepdog but several greedy humans are determined to see him end up on a dinner plate. Family comedy, with James Cromwell. ★★★★ **11.05 FILM: Black Beauty (1994)** Family drama, starring Sean Bean. ★★★ **12.45 ITV Lunchtime News 12.55 ITV News Central 1.00 Midsomer Murders** As Midsomer St Claire prepares for storms and flooding, it appears a murderer is using ancient torture methods to punish modern-day "sinners". (R)

CH4

Joel confides in Sienna about his feelings, Hollyoaks, on at 6.30pm

7.20 FILM: The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie (2004) Children's animated comedy, with the voice of Tom Kenny. ★★★ **8.55 Lego Masters** The teams compete in two challenges on the theme of movement. (R) **10.00 The Simpsons** Marge joins the local police academy. (R) **10.30 The Simpsons** Homer gets a new wife. With the voice of Ricky Gervais. (R) **11.00 FILM: Spy Kids 4: All the Time in the World (2011)** Two children learn their stepmother is a secret agent and help her battle an evil genius with the power to control time. Family adventure, starring Jessica Alba and Jeremy Piven. ★★ **12.45 FILM: The Net (1995)** Thriller, with Sandra Bullock and Jeremy Northam. ★★

CH5

Action from the second heat, World's Strongest Man 2017, on at 8.00pm

6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 Cruising with Jane McDonald Highlights of Jane's tour of Alaska, America's largest state. (R) **9.30 The Gadget Show** (R) **10.25 FILM: The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958)** Fantasy adventure, with Kerwin Mathews. ★★★ **12.15 FILM: The Vikings (1958)** A Norse warrior fights to claim the Northumbrian throne, unaware his rival for the crown is really his half-brother. Adventure, with Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh. ★★★★ **2.30 FILM: Jason and the Argonauts (1963)** The son of an overthrown king battles monsters during an epic voyage in search of a magical golden fleece. Fantasy adventure, with Todd Armstrong and Honor Blackman. ★★★

Prime Time

3.45 The Gruffalo's Child (R)
4.10 How to Train Your Dragon 2 (2014) ★★★
5.45 Pointless (R)
6.30 BBC News
6.45 Midlands Today; Weather
7.00 Celebrity Mastermind Antiques expert Philip Serrell, comedian and actor Richard McCourt, poet and presenter Lemn Sissay and Sports anchor Olivia Wayne compete.
7.30 Still Open All Hours New series. Granville faces being left alone at Christmas as all his friends and neighbours make plans to go away – leaving him at the amorous mercy of Mrs Featherstone.
8.00 EastEnders Fi breaks into Willmott-Brown's office to find out the truth about her father, while he tries to manipulate Kathy. Karen reaches out to her sister for financial help.
8.30 Little Women Jo feels snubbed when Amy is chosen over her to accompany Aunt Carroll's daughter on a tour of Europe, so she flees to New York to pursue her career. Last in the series.
9.30 EastEnders Fi is sickened to discover how low her family have sunk, Linda is hell-bent on finding another local pub to manage and Bernadette tells Kandice about the family's money troubles.
10.00 BBC News
10.15 Midlands Today
10.25 Bruno Mars: Live in Harlem
11.10 U2 at the BBC The band performs some of their biggest hits at Abbey Road Studios, alongside tracks from their latest album, Songs of Experience, and chat to Cat Deeley about their lives. (R)
12.25 Weather for the Week Ahead 12.30 BBC News

3.55 Inside the Factory (R)
4.55 The Heroes of Telemark (1965) ★★★
7.00 Thailand: Earth's Tropical Paradise Exploring the forests, plains and cities of Central Thailand, and revealing how the nation's people find spiritual fulfilment in their relationships with animals. (R)
8.00 Christmas University Challenge 2017 Teams from the University of Leicester and UCL compete, with Paralympian Danielle Brown, Sky at Night presenter Pete Lawrence and the BBC's Jeremy Bowen among the contestants.
8.30 Six Robots & Us Part two of two. The experts deliver more robots to families around the UK, including a north London couple who receive a machine designed to help their autistic four-year-old.
9.30 Attenborough and the Empire of the Ants David Attenborough tells the story of two physically identical species of ant that have two very different strategies to survive the harsh environment of the Swiss Alps.
10.30 Romesh Ranganathan: Irrational Live The comedian's first-ever live stand-up show, in which the Bafta-nominated star takes shots at everyone from his children to a stranger in a coffee shop.
11.30 Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa (2013) The hapless local radio DJ ends up in the middle of a siege when a colleague responds to being fired by taking hostages. Comedy, starring Steve Coogan. ★★★
12.55 FILM: Oasis: Supersonic (2016) ★★★ **2.55 Sign Zone: Employable Me** (R)

3.00 Tenable Quiz, hosted by Warwick Davis. (R)
4.00 Tipping Point Game show, hosted by Ben Shephard. (R)
5.00 The Chase Quiz show, hosted by Bradley Walsh. (R)
6.00 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs The comedian tries to train three huge puppies that spent the first five months of their lives being raised by a homeless man, and sets out to reunite a Jack Russell with its owner. (R)
6.30 ITV News Central; Weather.
6.45 ITV Evening News; Weather.
7.00 Emmerdale Rebecca confesses her plans, Jimmy and Nicola receive a tempting offer, and Bernice prepares for her date.
8.00 Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2007) The wizard forms his fellow pupils into a secret army to battle the resurrected Lord Voldemort. Fantasy adventure sequel, starring Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Gary Oldman. ★★★
10.35 ITV News; Weather.
10.54 ITV Central Weather
10.55 Tina & Bobby The West Ham player leads England to World Cup glory at Wembley and fame and fortune follow, as the couple become icons of their time. Lorne MacFadyen and Michelle Keegan star. (R)
11.55 Stuck on You: The Football Sticker Story How four Italian brothers took a childhood obsession and turned it into a worldwide industry – and the British upstarts who took on the mighty Panini to beat them at their own game. (R)
12.45 Jackpot247 3.00 Tenable (R) **3.50 ITV Nightscreen**

3.00 Four Rooms with Sarah Beeny
4.00 Channel 4 News
4.20 Back to the Future Part III (1990) ★★★
6.30 Hollyoaks
7.00 We're Going on a Bear Hunt Animated adventure based on Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury's popular children's story, featuring the voices of Olivia Colman, Pam Ferris and Mark Williams. (R)
7.30 The Secret Life of the Zoo at Christmas Chester Zoo's keepers are busy making gifts for all the animals, and it is a chaotic free-for-all when the festive parcels are handed over to the chimps. (R)
8.30 The Secret Life of 5 Year Olds on Holiday One-off special in which familiar faces from the observational series are shown away from the classroom as they and their families jet off to the Sunwing resort in Cyprus.
9.00 What Britain Bought in 2017 Mary Portas surveys Britain's spending habits over the past 12 months, and looks back at some of the retail stories, such as the popularity of Prosecco and the fidget spinner.
10.00 The Undateables at Christmas Familiar faces from the dating show share their extra special plans for the festive season, with Daniel from Brighton busy planning the release of his latest single. (R)
11.05 About a Boy (2002) A womaniser who poses as a father to meet single women changes his ways after befriending a lonely youngster. Romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Toni Collette and Nicholas Hoult. ★★★
12.55 Alan Carr's Christmas Chatty Man (R) **2.50 Paul O'Grady's 100 Years of Movie Musicals** (R)

4.30 André Rieu: My Life in Music Profile of the Dutch violinist. (R)
6.00 Andre Rieu: Christmas in London A festive concert by the Dutch violinist and the Johann Strauss Orchestra, featuring carols as well as songs including Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah and the Concierto de Aranjuez. (R)
7.00 Winter in Alaska Documentary following four seasons in the north American state, beginning with winter, where snowfall is measured in feet rather than inches; (R) 5 News Update
8.00 World's Strongest Man 2017 Action from the second heat in Botswana, which featured Iceland's Hafthor Julius Bjornsson, a man who has stood on the podium five times but has never been crowned champion; 5 News Tonight
9.00 Flight (2012) Premiere. A pilot is hailed as a hero for bringing a malfunctioning plane down safely – until it emerges he was drunk at the controls. Drama, with Denzel Washington and Don Cheadle. ★★★
11.45 The Taking of Pelham 123 (2009) Criminals hijack a crowded New York subway train and threaten to kill the passengers unless they are paid $10million. Thriller remake, with Denzel Washington and John Travolta. ★★★
1.45 SuperCasino Live interactive gaming. **3.05 Love/Hate** The gang members' lives spiral out of control. (R) **4.00 Cruising with Jane McDonald** A Lilliputian lope round the Inner Hebrides puts Jane in touch with her Scottish roots. (R) **4.45 House Doctor** A slightly neglected 200-year-old cottage. (R) **5.10 House Busters** (R) **5.35 Wildlife SOS** (R)

Late View

Friday, December 29

Early View

BBC 1

Rob Brydon hosts the comedy panel show, Would I Lie to You? 8.30pm

6.00 Breakfast News, entertainment and weather reports. **9.00 FILM: Monsters vs Aliens (2009)** Animated sci-fi comedy, with the voice of Reese Witherspoon. ★★★ **10.25 Shaun the Sheep: The Farmer's Llamas** (R) **10.55 FILM: Kung Fu Panda 2 (2011)** Animated comedy sequel, with the voice of Jack Black. ★★★ **12.15 Bargain Hunt** From Builth Wells, Powys. (R) **12.45 BBC News at One; Weather 1.00 Midlands Today; Weather 1.10 Father Brown** The priest investigates the murder of a B-movie director. (R) **1.55 Revolting Rhymes** The second of two animations based on Roald Dahl's children's book. (R) **2.25 FILM: Up (2009)** Animated adventure, with the voice of Ed Asner. ★★★★

BBC 2

Frankie Boyle's 2017 New Year World Order, on at 10.00pm

6.35 Sign Zone: MasterChef: The Professionals Challenges include making a fruit-based dessert. (R) **7.35 FILM: G-Force (2009)** Children's adventure, starring Bill Nighy. ★★ **8.55 The Big Family Cooking Showdown** (R) **9.55 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **10.25 Nadiya's British Food Adventure** (R) **10.55 Puerto Rico – Island of Enchantment: Natural World** (R) **11.55 FILM: Three Coins in the Fountain (1954)** Romantic drama, starring Dorothy McGuire. ★★★ **1.35 Nature's Weirdest Events** The town brought to a standstill by a swarm of flying insects. (R) **2.05 The World's Most Extraordinary Homes** A house in Canada inspired by two ships in dry dock. (R)

ITV

Warwick Davis hosts the quiz show, Tenable, on at 3.00pm

6.00 Good Morning Britain Ventriloquist and America's Got Talent winner Paul Zerdin talks about his stint in panto. Plus, news and current affairs, plus health, entertainment and lifestyle features. **8.30 Lorraine** Entertainment and fashion news. **9.25 Best Walks with a View with Julia Bradbury** The presenter ventures towards Cumbria's High Cup Nick. (R) **9.50 FILM: Everything or Nothing: The Untold Story of 007 (2012)** Documentary about the making of the James Bond films. ★★★ **11.45 Bond Girls Are Forever** The thrill of being a Bond girl. (R) **12.45 ITV Lunchtime News;** Weather. **12.55 ITV News Central;** Weather. **1.00 Midsomer Murders** A man is mauled to death by a wild boar. (R)

Ch4

Ashley Jensen guests, Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast, on at 8.00pm

7.05 FILM: Black Nativity (2013) Musical, starring Jacob Latimore. ★★★ **8.50 Lego Masters** The teams compete in two challenges on the theme of nature. (R) **9.50 The Simpsons** Bart develops a sense of civic pride. (R) **10.20 The Simpsons** Springfield gets a new telephone code. (R) **10.50 The Simpsons** Homer and Marge dispense marital advice. (R) **11.15 FILM: Hotel for Dogs (2009)** An orphaned brother and sister in foster care transform an abandoned hotel into luxury accommodation for stray dogs. Family comedy, with Emma Roberts, Jake T Austin and Don Cheadle. ★★★ **1.20 FILM: Cutthroat Island (1995)** Swashbuckling adventure, with Geena Davis. ★★

Ch5

Action from the third heat, World's Strongest Man 2017, on at 8.00pm

6.00 Milkshake! 9.00 FILM: Arthur 2: On the Rocks (1988) The drunken millionaire is bankrupt, while his wife wants to have a baby and pushes him into taking responsibility for once. Comedy sequel, with Dudley Moore and Liza Minnelli. ★ **11.10 FILM: Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (1988)** Two rival conmen on the French Riviera make a wager over who will be the first to trick a glamorous heiress out of her fortune. Comedy, starring Michael Caine and Steve Martin. ★★★ **1.20 FILM: Labyrinth (1986)** A teenager travels through a magical maze to rescue her baby brother from a band of goblins and their sinister king. Fantasy adventure, starring Jennifer Connelly and David Bowie. ★★★

Prime Time

3.50 Room on the Broom (R)
4.20 Brave (2012) ★★★
5.45 Pointless (R)
6.30 BBC News at Six; Weather
6.45 Midlands Today; Weather
7.00 Celebrity Mastermind Actor John Bradley, hockey player Crista Cullen, Radio 1Xtra presenter Nick Bright and Hollyoaks actress Anna Passey compete in the specialist and general knowledge quiz.
7.30 Tim Vine Travels Through Time Christmas Special Tim journeys back in time to Tudor England in a quest to find a silver lion and bring Christmas to Henry VIII's court. Comedy, guest starring Emma Bunton and the Rev Richard Coles.
8.00 EastEnders Mick has to decide whether he is part of Aidan's gang, Carmel and Shakil put paid to Kush and Denise's hopes of a quiet night in, and the Vic regulars see the year out with a bang.
8.30 Would I Lie to You? Rob Brydon hosts the comedy panel show, with Steve Davis, Craig Parkinson, Sara Pascoe and Claudia Winkleman joining team captains David Mitchell and Lee Mack.
9.00 BBC News
9.10 Midlands Today; Weather; National Lottery Update
9.15 Gone Girl (2014) Premiere. A man reports his wife's disappearance, only to end up under media scrutiny and accused of murder. David Fincher's crime thriller, with Ben Affleck. ★★★
11.40 Michael McIntyre's Big Christmas Show The comedy star concludes his entertainment showcase with a festive special. (R)
12.45 Weather for the Week Ahead 12.50 BBC News

3.05 Inside the Factory (R)
4.05 The Desert Fox (1951) (b/w) ★★★
5.30 Thailand: Earth's Tropical Paradise (R)
6.30 Christmas University Challenge 2017
7.00 Morecambe & Wise: Leading Ladies Penelope Keith presents a compilation of highlights from the comedy duo's shows featuring appearances by female stars of stage and screen. (R)
8.00 Eric & Ernie's Home Movies Footage of Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise's home movies, chronicling their rise to fame as well as recording key moments in their private lives.
9.00 Vic & Bob's Big Night Out Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer present an updated version of Vic Reeves Big Night Out, featuring new and old characters and a healthy dose of slapstick humour.
9.30 Live at the Apollo Katherine Ryan hosts a festive instalment from the stage of London's Hammersmith Apollo, featuring Marlon Davis, Joel Dommett and John Robbins. Last in the series.
10.00 Frankie Boyle's 2017 New Year World Order The comedian tries to make sense of the past 12 months.
10.30 QI XL With Jason Manford, Romesh Ranganathan and Holly Walsh.
11.15 The Great Gatsby (2013) A naive writer befriends a decadent millionaire and slowly uncovers the dark underside of his lavish lifestyle. Period drama, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire. ★★★
1.35 Sign Zone: Doctor Who (R) **2.35 FILM: Sign Zone: Cinderella (2015)** ★★★ **4.30 This Is BBC Two**

3.00 Tenable A team of five from Merseyside answers questions. Last in the series. (R)
4.00 Tipping Point Game show, hosted by Ben Shephard. (R)
5.00 The Chase Quiz show, hosted by Bradley Walsh. (R)
6.00 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs A puppy is rushed to the clinic when an injury comes to light just days after arriving at Battersea, while Paul pampers a Yorkshire terrier that has been given up by its owner. (R)
6.30 ITV News Central; Weather.
6.45 ITV Evening News; Weather.
7.00 Emmerdale The Dingles get ready, and Bernice makes arrangements.
7.30 Coronation Street Roy begs Carla not to return to Devon and to move in with him instead, and Adam offers to help Geraldine get Summer taken away from Todd and Billy.
8.00 Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2009) The wizard must uncover the secrets of Lord Voldemort's past to try to end the evil sorcerer's reign of terror. Fantasy adventure sequel, with Daniel Radcliffe and Michael Gambon. ★★★
10.50 ITV News; Weather.
11.09 ITV Central Weather
11.10 Tina & Bobby The former England star winds up managing a lowly non-league side, and Tina dismisses rumours he's having an affair – until her worst fears are confirmed. Last in the series. (R)
12.10 Bear's Mission with Rob Brydon (R) **1.05 Jackpot247** Interactive gaming. **3.00 100 Year Old Drivers** (R) **3.50 ITV Nightscreen** Text-based information service.

3.40 Four Rooms with Sarah Beeny Items include a Second World War Tommy Gun.
4.45 Channel 4 News
5.00 The Simpsons Lisa joins a group of eco-radicals. (R)
5.30 The Simpsons Mr Burns hires Homer to play pranks. (R)
6.00 Hollyoaks Tom celebrates his birthday at The Loft.
7.00 Travel Man: 48 Hours in Hong Kong Richard Ayoade is joined by actor Jon Hamm, star of Mad Men and Baby Driver, for a Yuletide trek around Hong Kong – the most visited and most vertical city on the planet. (R)
8.00 Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast Jamie Oliver and Jimmy Doherty are joined by Ashley Jensen, who learns to make authentic Umbrian pasta with truffle. Jimmy also helps the RNLI create the perfect fundraising feast.
9.00 8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown Christmas Special Jimmy Carr hosts the comedy panel show's version of the words and numbers quiz, with Jon Richardson and Catherine Tate teaming up against Sean Lock and Joe Wilkinson.
10.00 Gogglebox 2017 Highlights from the most recent series, featuring the armchair critics' reactions to The Crystal Maze, the Weakest Link Celebrity Special, and Mary Berry's Country House Secrets. (R)
12.05 FILM: I Give It a Year (2013) ★★★ **1.55 FILM: The River Wild (1994)** ★★★ **3.50 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA** (R) **4.35 Four in a Bed** (R) **5.00 Jamie's Cracking Christmas** (R) **5.15 FILM: The Three Musketeers (1973)** ★★★

3.20 Look Who's Talking (1989) Comedy, starring Kirstie Alley. ★★★
5.10 Footloose (1984) Drama, starring Kevin Bacon. ★★★
7.00 Winter in Yorkshire As winter takes its toll, cameras follow grey seal pups at Ravenscar beach, and the progress of many short-eared owls that land on the moors; (R) 5 News Update
8.00 World's Strongest Man 2017 Action from the third heat in Botswana, which featured six tasks including the 15-tonne Bus Pull, the 350kg Dead Lift and the 200kg Elephant Carry; 5 News Update
9.00 Victoria Wood By Her Friends Profile of the writer and comedian, featuring clips of some of the funniest performances of her 40-year career and contributions from friends, fans and co-stars.
10.00 Victoria Wood: Live 1997 The comedian performs stand-up and sketches, recorded during Victoria's 1997 tour and acclaimed as one of the very best stand-up shows of the decade. (R)
12.00 SuperCasino Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.05 Love/Hate** Nidge seizes his opportunity to take control of the gang and sets about getting his cohorts back to business and Mary discovers the extent of Luke's obsession. Last in the series. (R) **4.00 Winter in Alaska** Documentary following four seasons in the north American state, beginning with winter, where snowfall is measured in feet rather than inches. (R) **4.45 House Doctor** A bachelor pad in Knutsford, Cheshire. (R) **5.10 House Busters** Life-enhancing changes to a home. (R) **5.35 Wildlife SOS** The work of volunteers at an animal sanctuary. (R)

Late View

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Theatre has planned a Grand 2018

They got rhythm – Tom Chambers and Charlotte Wakefield in the George and Ira Gershwin musical Crazy For You

Dancing Queens and Super Troupers will be heading to Wolverhampton Grand for the big ABBA hits in Mamma Mia!

Natural Woman – Bronté Barbé plays singer-songwriter Carole King in the acclaimed show about her life, Beautiful

In two minds – gothic horror as Phil Daniels plays Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

PANTO season is in full swing but Wolverhampton Grand Theatre has already planned a bumper 2018 of top shows, including a new thriller, fresh adaptations of classics and the return of some old favourites.

Jack And The Beanstalk continues the family fun until January 14. Then the Grand gets the new year off to a dramatic start with the premiere of Ruth Rendell thriller Gallowglass (written as Barbara Vine) a story about a child's kidnapping and obsession. It's at the Wolverhampton theatre from January 18 to 20.

The National Theatre's production of Henrick Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, given a modern makeover by award-winning playwright Patrick Marber, visits January 23-27. The late 19th century masterpiece tells of the original desperate housewife, the conflicted Hedda, a woman caught in a loveless marriage. It is a powerful role for Lizzy Watts, who had a part in TV's The Durrells as Larry's girlfriend Nancy.

Spine-tingling ghost story The Turn Of The Screw, adapted from Henry James' novel by Tim Luscombe, is on from April 10 to 14, then another classic tale of terror stars Quadrophenia actor Phil Daniels as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, May 1 to 5.

Grand musical highlights include blockbuster ABBA musical Mamma Mia! resident for three weeks, from February 6 to 24. Fans of can say Good Morning Baltimore again when Hairspray returns (February 26-March 3), and Willy Russell's Blood Brothers makes a comeback April 16-21.

A top-notch cast, spectacular staging and great Gershwin tunes combine to make Crazy For You, with Tom 'Strictly' Chambers, Claire Sweeney and Charlotte Wakefield, one of the most eagerly-awaited shows of the year, on from May 8 to 12.

Joe Pasquale steps into the shoes of Michael Crawford as the accident-prone Frank Spencer in a new stage version of Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em, based on the classic 70s TV sit-com.

June is musical month with Beautiful the acclaimed Carole King Musical, with Bronté Barbé as the US hitmaker, coming to the Grand (12-16) as part of its first UK tour after West End success.

Then Hayley Tamaddon (so good in the touring version of Chicago) stars in the 1920s-set flapper musical Thoroughly Modern Millie (26-30).

The Jersey Boys are working their way back to Wolverhampton to bring the music of The Four Seasons from August 28 to September 8. The recent West End favourite Kinky Boots struts its stuff at the Grand from October 16 to 27.

And, by the way, is you are eager for further panto magic next year – the Grand has already announced that next festive season's panto is Sleeping Beauty, and tickets are available now.

For further details about these shows and many more, including one-nighters and amateur productions, see grandtheatre.co.uk or call 01902 429212.

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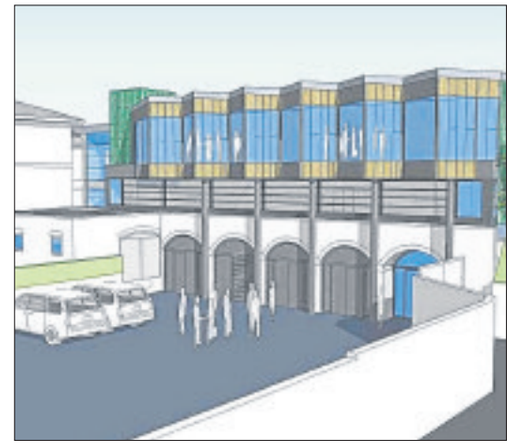
Compton Hospice, which has secured £1.5m for its revamp

Claire Marshall with Paul Baugh, Mark Jenkins, Barrie Malia and Cyril Barrett



The new hub will bring together the services

£1.5m means Goodyear for hospice

COMPTON Hospice has secured the full £1.5 million for a major extension after ex-Goodyear workers agreed to donate the sum.

Work is due to begin in the summer on a new facility which has been hailed as a parting gift from the tyre giant synonymous with Wolverhampton.

The Goodyear workers' fund, built up over more than 30 years from sick and distress pay, initially pledged £1 million towards the project but now has confirmed it will be able to give another £500,000.

Cyril Barrett, chairman of the group of Unite members, said the community administration hub would act as a 'living legacy' of the Goodyear workers after the city's plant closed for good in August.

The redevelopment – which has been approved by Wolverhampton Council planners – will see the main building on Compton Road West redesigned.

The main purpose of the hub will be to bring the charity's range of support services including inpatient care, care in the home, daycare facilities and psychosocial care, under one roof, creating a single point of access for healthcare professionals and families.

A link between the hall and the hospice accommodation will be created.

Mr Barrett, from the Goodyear workers 5/344 Transport and General Workers Sick and Distress Fund, said members were proud something positive would come from the closure of the landmark plant, which resulted in hundreds losing their jobs.

He said: "We held 20 meetings with members and the one thing they made clear was supporting Compton Hospice was a priority.

"Planning permission has been granted and hopefully in the middle of next year we will see the start of the process of building the communication centre."

Legacy

He added: "It is so important to us. The hospice has provided care and support to families of many of our members. This is a project we wanted to do.

"On behalf of my colleagues, I am absolutely delighted and so proud.

"What we are doing is what we promised, creating a living legacy to good, honest, hard-working people who have been members of the fund since 1985."

Mr Barrett said the workers' group, which has supported countless charities across the Black Country, had budgeted to be able to give £1.5 million but was only now in a position to confirm it could provide the full amount.

It means hospice bosses will not have to apply elsewhere for additional funding.

Compton Hospice chief executive Claire Marshall said: "It's so exciting. Patients' needs are getting more complex and we want to serve more patients than we ever have. It means we will have a really good, co-ordinated service.

"We co-ordinate care between GPs, hospitals and other care providers. Having this facility is essential going forward to help provide a seamless experience for patients."

Ms Marshall said hospice bosses had been overwhelmed by the support of the former Goodyear workers. She said: "£1.5 million is a vast amount of money by anybody's measure and the fact it is coming from the community which has supported us for decades is amazing. It came as a surprise, certainly the scale of it.

When it started, to get £1 million we were just euphoric. Now it has been extended to £1.5 million – the whole cost of the project – is just incredible."

After securing planning permission for the extension, finding the extra money needed for the scheme means Compton has now passed the final hurdle. Work is expected to take up to nine months.

Fund secretary and former Goodyear worker Paul Bough said: "Everyone has got some sort of affinity with Compton Hospice, their family has been helped."

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Motown the Musical

If ever a musical genre lent itself to theatre, it was the mass harmonics and wall-of-sound dramatics of Motown. Motown the Musical is the story of Berry Gordy, a former Detroit car-worker living in an America riven by race riots, who scraped together a shoestring budget in 1959 to found a record label which became its own assembly-line of sensational hits.

Featuring 40 classic songs including My Girl, Stop! In The Name of Love, Dancing in the Street, I Heard It Through The Grapevine and Ain't No Mountain High Enough, this production won't disappoint.

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Dominic Cavendish, The Telegraph

School of Rock

Dewey Finn, a failed wannabe rock star, decides to earn a little extra cash by posing as a substitute teacher at a prestigious prep school. Not being a star academic performer nor great at marking essays, Dewey instead decides to create his own curriculum, turning his class into a guitar-shredding, bass-slapping, mind-blowing rock band.

Based on the Paramount film written by Mike White and starring Jack Black, this rocking stage musical is produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber who has added 14 new songs to the score, which also includes all the original songs from the film.

London Theatre Break

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Stourbridge Chronicle Thursday, December 21, 2017

Impreza remains a left-field choice

By Jon Reay

This is the latest version of Subaru's bread-and-butter, Ford Focus-sized hatchback. The Impreza name dates back to 1992, and while it evokes memories of fire-breathing WRX and STI models for many people in the UK, Subaru explains that this car isn't trying to live up to that reputation.

Instead, it's built in the image of the original, more modestly powered model: offering a capable all-wheel-drive car for people who don't necessarily want a high-riding SUV.

Subaru stresses that the car is new from the ground up, complete with a brand new platform that will underpin future models in the range. The focus, says Subaru, has been on better driving dynamics and safety – the latter taken care of by a whole array of safety gear, headlined by the brand's ubiquitous EyeSight forward-facing dual-camera tech.

There have been plenty of changes under the skin, too. Subaru says the steering is now 0.1 seconds quicker to react (bear with us, it does make a difference), the already low centre of gravity has been dropped further still, the gearbox has lost 8kg of weight and the chassis is as much as 100 per cent stiffer in some areas. It's all been with the aim of making sure the Impreza isn't just safer than before, but that bit better to drive too.

There's a choice of two engines: a 1.6 and a 2.0-litre, both naturally aspirated petrols.

Subaru continues to use its 'Boxer' engine configuration, which keeps the centre of gravity low and means it can slide in the brand's traditional 'symmetrical' all-wheel-drive system.

There's no diesel option, but fuel economy is reasonable for a petrol-powered car with permanent all-wheel-drive and an automatic gearbox. For now, we'd opt for the 2.0-litre: there's a more usable amount of power, and unlike the wheezy 1.6, it has the added bonus of steering wheel-mounted paddles for awaking the gearbox from its slumber.

Subaru has done away with a manual gearbox option, leaving only a CVT. It won't be to all tastes, but as CVTs go it's not too bad. Most of the time it's quite pleasant to use: smooth, unobtrusive, and willingly changes up and down its virtual gears without fuss.

Subaru has concentrated heavily on making the Impreza feel 'safe' on the road, which translates to predictable handling and almost unshakeable levels of grip, courtesy of its 'active torque split' four-wheel-drive system. Chuck the Impreza into a bend or roundabout with some vigour and it's easy to be impressed by its determination to hang on.

Thankfully the Impreza rides extremely well too, with very little intrusion from potholes, speed bumps and the like, while body roll is kept reasonably well in check as well. Dynamically in fact, it's up there with some of its more mainstream rivals, and has something of a unique character of its own.

Imprezas have had something of a tumultuous history when it comes to styling, and even Subaru admits that the previous car wasn't anything to shout about in the looks department. To our eyes the new model is an improvement. It's a shame though that Subaru has chosen not to offer the more attractive 18-inch alloy wheels of our test car on UK models. They'd go some way to help the Impreza shake off its dowdy utilitarian image.

There are some definite improvements over the old car inside – though things are still inescapably Japanese. Material quality is still miles off that of the opposition, while Subaru freely admits that the dash hasn't been designed with purely aesthetics in mind.

The Impreza is now dynamically very capable, doesn't look half bad and has a seriously generous standard kit list

What has been concentrated on is ergonomics: things like the climate controls are all easy to reach, and can be used without taking your eyes off the road, while dials are clear to read if not inspiring to look at.

Things are pretty roomy inside too – not something you could always say about the Impreza. Boot space is competitive at 385 litres, and rear leg room is impressive too: easily large enough for four six-feet-tall adults.

Subaru is only bringing one trim level to the UK: the 'SE'. There's plenty bundled in, particularly in terms of safety: you'll find blind-spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, pre-collision braking assist, lane departure warning and auto high-beam all as standard. Adaptive cruise control is thrown in too, as are auto LED headlights that now steer around corners, rain sensitive wipers, keyless entry, a reversing camera, climate control and heated front seats. Infotainment is taken care of with an eight-inch touch screen which works with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, though no built-in sat nav is available.

The previous Impreza had been all-but forgotten in the UK; and it's likely that the new model will suffer the same fate. There are big improvements over the old car, but without some major UK-centric tweaks to its powertrain and gearbox, it'll continue to be a left-field choice.

That's a shame, because it's now dynamically very capable, doesn't look half bad and has a seriously generous standard kit list. If you're after a small family hatchback and value safety above all else, the Impreza is certainly worth a look.

Model: Subaru Impreza 2.0 Lineartronic
Price as tested: £24,995

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07754 263732/01562 243346

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STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION ACT 1984 (AS AMENDED)
ROAD TRAFFIC (TEMPORARY RESTRICTIONS) ACT 1991
VARIOUS ROADS IN THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE (SURFACE DRESSING 2018)
DIVERSION OF VEHICULAR TRAFFIC

NOTICE is hereby given that the Staffordshire County Council intend, not less than seven days from the date of this Notice, to make an Order the effect of which will be to prohibit any vehicle from proceeding in those lengths of various roads as given in Schedule A/W3 below unless the vehicle is being used in connection with the works; or unless the vehicle requires access to premises on the length of road or is being used for police, fire brigade or ambulance purposes. Pedestrian access will be maintained.

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Diversion routes will be signed on site where required. For more information please visit www.roadworks.org or contact us on 0300 111 8000. The Order will come into operation on 22 January 2018, and the said works will commence on or as near as practicable to that date. It is anticipated that the works will be completed by 28 September 2018.

The Order will remain in force for a period of 18 months or until the surface dressing works, which it is proposed to carry out on or near the road, have been completed, whichever is the earlier.

John Tradewell, Director for Strategy, Governance and Change, 2 Staffordshire Place, Tipping Street, Stafford. ST16 2DH

Ref: 4096337; Enquiries: Customer Contact Centre; Tel: 0300 111 8000 http://roadworks.org

Date: 29 December 2017

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Single Women

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ALISON, 38, attractive slim, mature student, passionate about history, seeks older male for good conversation, friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429667**

YAZ, Asian lady, 32yrs, very slim and pretty. Hoping to meet a strong minded, dominant, resourceful man. Mature please 45+ **Text Only. Box: 4177148**

HEATHER, single, very attractive brunette, 34, sensual and interesting, looking to add to life's experiences and adventures with professional male. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429647**

SOPHIE, 46yrs, attractive professional lady with time on her hands. Hoping to meet a nice gent of any age, text fun, flirt, possible meeting. **Text Only. Box: 4126579**

JAN 47, once bitten twice shy! Just looking for non complicated fun times. Attractive, discreet, OHAC, you won't be disappointed. Any age/looks/status. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429453**

SARAH black lady, works as a nurse. 48yrs young, hoping to meet a younger man for some fun. Let me be your couger and dress me up in my uniform. **Text Only. Box: 4166063**

SARAH 35, recently divorced, slim 5ft 7ins, pretty, seeks male up to 50yrs for meals out hopefully leading to more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429385**

MELANIE, attractive lady, 38yrs, hoping to meet a nice chap, any age, for chats, non complicated times. Must have great soh, looks unimportant. **Text Only. Box: 4037147**

DEBBIE 38, fit size 12, discreet, WLTM intelligent man for fun relationship with no ties. Any age. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429417**

I am a discreet married black lady who is hoping to meet a man of any colour for some daytime chats, maybe meet up, maybe just text to prolong the interest in our ways. **Text Only. Box 4063856**

FEMALE, divorced, 58yrs old, looking for a nice man, non-smoker, clean-shaven. I enjoy walking, meals in/out, musical shows and much more. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5662627**

GEORGINA, 46yrs, sophisticated professional lady (teacher), quite firm but kind! Interested in finding out more? I am interested to chat to you so call me today. **Text Only. Box: 4151593**

FEMALE 46. honest, genuine and caring. Looking for LTR with a male. **Text only replies. Box no: 4209465**

MANDY 36, size 10 but busty, open-minded and doesn't suffer fools, looking for relationship with nice guy for discreet relationship. Status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429287**

ANNA, 53yrs, attractive blonde lady, with lovely curves. Seeking man any age for no strings discreet fun. **Tel: 0906 515 3043 Box: 429721**

PAMELA, mature presentable lady, well educated, solvent, very young at heart. Hoping to meet presentable gent. Call me. Or text if you prefer. I promise to get back to you. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429329**

AMANDA, 36yrs, attractive lady. Solvent and well educated and spoken. Feminine figure with large breasts. Hoping to meet a broad-minded gent, any age for discreet relationship. I don't mind if you are married or single. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3035 Box: 429287**

LINDA, late 50s lady, promises to call you back if you text or call. She's attractive and waiting to meet you. You must be 40+ with GSOH. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429325**

ANGELA, 48yrs, seeks no strings casual fun. I have my own house, car and am solvent. I'm busty with a firm figure. You must be open minded, age/status unimportant. **Tel: 0906 515 3015 Box: 427633**

ATTRACTIVE widowed lady, 70yrs but looks much much younger. GSOH, fun loving. WLTM man 67+ for loving tender relationship. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429327**

MARIELLE, 45yrs, curvy attractive lady, likes older men. I'm married so you must be discreet. Lets meet up, and make each other smile again. Call me and lets get to know each other. **Tel: 0906 515 3039 Box: 426853**

JACKIE 40, slim easygoing blonde, works too hard, needs sincere male to help liven up her free time. Looks/status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429381**

KATIE 35yrs, slender well educated brunette seeks no strings mutual pleasure with gent 40+ Must be discreet, married or single. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3003 Box 419673**

SOPHIA young 40yrs, married but bored, seeks discreet adult fun, any area, all calls answered. **Tel: 0906 515 3019 Box: 413399**

JAN 47, once bitten twice shy! Just looking for non complicated fun times. Attractive, discreet, OHAC, you won't be disappointed. Any age/looks/status. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429453**

HARRIETT 42yrs, blue eyed brunette with long lets and decent curves! Looking for a cheeky adventurous man for fun only. I live alone so can accommodate and can travel. Discretion assured. ACA. Give me a try. **Tel: 0906 515 3031 Box 426205**

FEMALE 67, smoker, enjoys music, TV, meals out/in, looking for male 68-75 for friendship maybe more. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5877942**

SAMANTHA, 35yrs, attractive brunette with own business, seeks adventurous gent for casual relationship. **Tel: 0906 515 3035 Box 425979**

TINA, 58yrs, slim, passionate and kind. Loves eating out. Hoping to meet gent 55-63. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429167**

JANE, young 41, very broadminded seeks chap any age for discreet no strings fun, any age, no time wasters ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3011 Box: 409715**

JULIE, attractive early 40s brunette, size 10, varied interests, WLTM male for fun times, good conversations, spoiling and maybe more. Status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429401**

MARGARET 42, busty chubby female WLTM Muslim men, Pakistani, Kurdish or Indian welcome, daytime/evening, no strings. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5838907**

EMILY, mature well educated lady, blonde and smart and broadminded seeks gent any age for no strings fun. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3023 Box 421375**

TAMMY, sincere mature lady, easygoing animal lover. Loves travel, eating out etc. Call me if you are interested in a chat. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429333**

TAMIKA, mature black beauty, hourglass figure and open minded. Pls call if you are discreet, broad minded and nice. I can travel and accommodate. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3007 Box 422365**

RACHAEL, 44yrs, loves life, varied interests, GSOH, kind and attractive. Seeks similar male of any age. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429323**

LISA, 50yrs, curvy honey blonde lady. Loves life. Hoping to meet a kind gent of any age. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429321**

SHARON, 48, tall slim attractive, lives alone with no ties, love romanticising and WLTM man for good times together, maybe more. Any age. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429125**

ATTRACTIVE lady, 56yrs. Slim, brunette who loves life. I'm very passionate and loving. Call me if you are interested. I will reply to all calls and texts. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429043**

SUE, 44, country loving lady, tall, slim, looking for similar country gent to share adventures in the great outdoors with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429251**

CAROLINE, 42yrs, well educated, sophisticated "some call me posh" married lady, looking for no strings midweek liaisons. **Tel: 0906 515 3027 Box 427533**

CARMEL, open minded naughty lady seeks a broad minded strict man to unleash her wilder side. Age/looks unimportant but no time wasters please. **Tel: 0906 515 3043 Box 426851**

ATTRACTIVE lady, late sixties, hoping to meet a nice chap for walking, wining dining, and much much more. Age unimportant ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429161**

ELIZABETH, 45, fed up with lonely nights! Blonde blue eyed, no children/ties, WLTM someone for cosy nights in and TLC. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429221**

ATTRACTIVE lady, 70yrs young, slim, fit and young for my age. I'm hoping to meet a kind gent, must have GSOH, age/looks unimportant. Must be smart and good company. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429039**

JANE, 49yrs, own home, loves nature, artistic. Love to socialise. WLTM gent any age, must have GSOH. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429165**

ATTRACTIVE widow, 70s, solvent, fit and still attractive GSOH, hoping to meet a nice gent for days out, possibly more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429159**

LINDA, 61, attractive, looking for a good man who is loving, tactile and sensitive. Can you put the spring back in my step? **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429085**

JANE, 49, attractive young looking female, fit and sporty, has much to offer someone special, would love to be part of a couple again. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429067**

JANE, 47, confident full figured and all woman, likes cosy nights in with that special person, looking for friendship maybe more. Age/looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428905**

CAROLE Ann, 56, sensitive, slim, fun loving brunette, loves to cook for her man, seeks tall, handsome male for a tactile relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428891**

GENT, 65, seeks discreet lady, for special times, mutually beneficial to both, with that special lady. Wolverhampton and surrounding areas. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 427529**

STEVE, 43 years old, 5ft 7ins, slim, non-smoker, smart casual dresser would like to meet a similar lady. Age and looks unimportant. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6116902**

MATURE, oriental female sought by easygoing male, 73, for NSA friendship. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6117412**

AMATEUR photographer, single, seeking bored broad-minded lady to have some discreet fun with a camera. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6109868**

100% genuine, good looking blue eyed guy, 40s, looking to meet a black or mixed race lady, for romance and maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428913**

TALL, dark, attractive Shropshire male, 57, WLTM an attractive female, for discreet daytime fun and excitement. Any age or status. Can travel. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429301**

COLIN, 50, kind, loving, seeks kind loving, cuddly, large lady, 45-55, for LTR, love and romance. Must like hugs, kisses, cuddles and holding hands. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6091169**

JEFF, 60s, tall, fit, young outlook, N/S, car owner, seeks similar lady for friendship, outings out etc. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428175**

ATTRACTIVE male, 56, 6ft, WLTM an attractive female, any age, for discreet fun and intimate times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428109**

HI I am a single Indian male in my 50s, and would like to meet a mature female 55+ for a NSA friendship. **Text only replies. Box no: 4627019**

WALSALL male, looking for no strings adult fun, with lady of any nationality, colour or age. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428773**

EASYGOING likeable man likes a drink at the pub, and nights in front of the telly and a cuddle, looking for lady 45-55. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6066059**

DERBY male, young 57, looking for uncared, unloved married woman looking for discreet adult fun 35-55. Txt me for a good time. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5321154**

MALE seeks affectionate, tactile, no drama, down to earth woman for nights in/out and loads of cuddles. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418695**

ADVENTUROUS 36 year old, slim, dark hair, has many interests, seeks female for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417235**

MALE would like to meet local female 50/60 for mutual friendship. I'm easygoing and have many interests. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5071056**

COLIN 72, from Burntwood, looking for loving lady for days out, holidays and company. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 4880436**

MALE, 20s, seeks NSA fun with female. I love a laugh, age isn't important. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6042304**

MALE 46, genuine and honest and very caring looking for a LTR with lady. **Text only Replies. Mailbox: 5422168**

MALE 20s, chilled out and happy in life looking for woman to share life with. **Text only Replies. Mailbox: 6034839**

MALE, 47, fit, slim, honest man, seeking nice, slim, honest lady for LTR, going out for drinks and having good times together. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 427923**

MIKE, male, 61, seeks black or Asian lady, any age for adult fun, maybe more. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6010228**

Single Men

MALE, mid 50s, N/S, semi retired, slim build, likes walking, holidays, occasional drinks, films, good chats, enjoys life, looking to meet a female, N/S, 50 plus, for friendship and going out. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429637**

COLIN, 50, seeks kind, caring, loving cuddly large lady 40-60 for LTR and love. Likes cuddles and kisses. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6091169**

RETIRED fitness instructor 65, would like to meet lady for friendship, company, on a regular basis. First ever advert. Beeston area. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6118348**

64 year old male, WLTM a lady between 60-75, for friendship and outings. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419929**

MALE, age 68, very active looking for lady for NSA fun. Can accommodate. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6026972**

MALE, late 60s, N/S, retired, 5ft9, slim build, enjoys holidays abroad, weekends away, travel, meals out. Looking to meet female, N/S, who enjoys similar interests, to share good times together, for friendship and maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428219**

JEFF, 60s, tall, fit, young outlook, N/S, car owner, seeks similar lady for friendship, outings out etc. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 428175**

Gay Singles

Join our Gay online service ***FREE*** visit: ***localgaydate.co.uk***

MALE, tall, slim, 60ish, would love to meet males for fun times in the West Midlands. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429563**

MALE bi guy, 70, seeking similar aged guy with daytime accommodation, for mutual fun. Glos area. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 4171960**

BI male, 50s, can be submissive seeks older male for discreet meets. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5560402**

BI, retired, WLTM similar guys in West Midlands, 65-80, for friendship and fun. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 6022718**

MALE, tall, slim, 60ish, would love to meet males for fun times in the West Midlands. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 429563**

BI male, living in the Wolverhampton area, seeking bi or gay or cross dresser who can accommodate, for fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 427531**

NAUGHTY boy 57, seeks strict dominant gent to whip him into shape. **Text only replies. Mailbox: 5378503**

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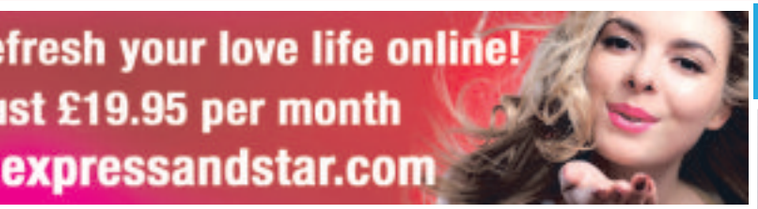

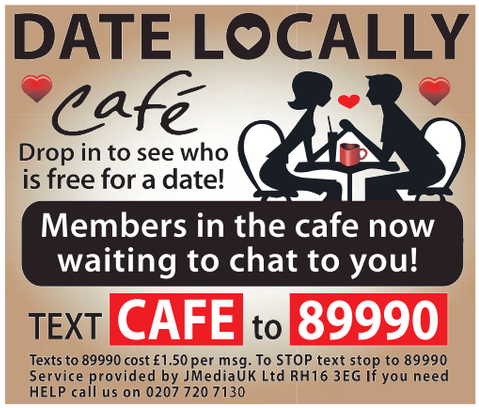

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Front, from left, Colin Thompson, Peter Holmes and Alan Ryder with fellow winners

Veteran of the Year went to Anna Edwards, aged 67

Kully Dulay, Angela Slater, Natalie Gilliland and Jane Langford from Ladybirds

Volunteer of the Year, 11-year-old Neve Egan

The Special Award of the Year presented to Councillor Mak Singh

Sporting heroes step into the spotlight for awards

WOLVERHAMPTON'S sporting heroes took centre stage at the city's Sports Advisory Council awards night.

The annual event gives recognition to clubs, sportsmen and women as well as the unsung heroes who put in hours of service behind the scenes.

The Sports Advisory Council celebrated its 50th birthday earlier this year and chairman Peter Holmes MBE, who has overseen every awards ceremony since its formation, was delighted to celebrate sport and to acknowledge the unselfish work of countless volunteers.

"It was a pleasant evening and it was lovely to see a group of people who don't normally get acknowledged step into the spotlight," he said.

"I still get a tingle when I see what these wonderful people have contributed to their sport. In many cases it has been anonymous.

"A lot of these people have been ignored in the past, I hope we are highlighting what they do. I hope people appreciate what we try to do and it is purely and simply about the anonymous workers getting their true recognition.

"What never ceases to amaze me is the fact that we are a sporting city. Sport is in the DNA of every true Wulfrunian, whether they are a performer, a supporter or an official – somewhere in their DNA sport is in there.

Realise

"We have 18 centenary clubs in the city and in five years time we will have four more. I wish the council would realise this is in selling Wolverhampton. When people come into Wolverhampton, one of the first things they get into is sport.

"It's the opportunity for them to integrate into life in Wolverhampton. It's so simple, and yet we tend to ignore it. There are no barriers in sport, the only barrier is whether you can afford to take part."

Councillor Steve Evans handed out the 11 awards at Fordhouses Cricket Club. Wolverhampton City of Netball League stalwart Lorraine Shail took the Award of Merit for her years of service as a player, coach and umpire.

The Disabled Athlete of the Year went to Richard Hammond, celebrating his 20th year as a member of Wolverhampton Special Olympics. He has trained with the swimming and gymnastic sections since the age of nine. He won two silver medals in the UK Special Olympic Games held in Sheffield in August to add to the two he won representing Great Britain at World Special Olympic Games in Athens in 2011.

SPORTING FEATURE

By Nick Elwell

"We are a sporting city. Sport is in the DNA of every true Wulfrunian. Somewhere in their DNA sport is in there."

The Coach of the Year accolade was picked up by Steve Peat. Peat was nominated by Wolverhampton Special Olympics after taking on a table tennis coaching role with the group.

He quickly made his mark with Wolverhampton the only group from the West Midlands to claim a gold at the Games in Sheffield earlier this year.

There was further cause for celebration for Wolverhampton Special Olympics after Jacky Silvester was named Volunteer of the Year.

Silvester has been coaching gymnastics and athletics for 32 years and is also head coach of the West Midlands Special Olympics, chair of the Wolverhampton Special Olympics and has coached at seven national summer games.

Wolverhampton City Netball netted another two prizes with Neve Egan scooping the Young Volunteer of the Year award and Anna Edwards the Veteran of the Year. As well as playing for Blaze, 11-year-old Egan is always on hand to help out with coaching and various other duties for her club and within the league.

Edwards stills plays at the age of 67 for Zimmers and has clocked up more than 50 years on court since she started playing netball at Manor Secondary School. She has also turned out for Park Rebels and Sam and is a well-known and popular figure with clubmates and oppositionplayers alike.

Wolverhampton & Bilston Athletics Club were also honoured for reaching their half-century. The club was formed in 1967 when Wolverhampton Harriers and Bilston Athletic Harriers joined forces.

Over the years they have produced some outstanding athletes who have represented the club and their country on the world stage.

Javelin thrower Tessa Sanderson won Olympic gold at Los Angeles in 1984 while Gary and Kath Cook won silver and bronze in their respective 4x400m relay events.

The club has also been granted the Queen's Award for outstanding work in the community and continues to go from strength to strength.

Ladybirds Netball Club were named Team/Club of the Year. They joined the Wolverhampton City Netball League in 1986 under the name of Wood Green High School.

After a few years of action they changed their name to Market Tavern after obtaining a sponsorship deal and have been playing under the Ladybirds guise since 1994.

Their on-court successes include winning the league's Handicap Tournament, Open Knockout and Non-Knockout Cup.

Councillor Mak Singh walked away with the Special Award of the Year. Singh has given outstanding support to the Sports Advisory Council and was a key figure in organising the 50 year celebrations in the summer.

Bollywood

Singh has an impressive sporting background having won numerous powerlifting titles and also spent several years as a stunt double in Bollywood films.

The final two awards were the RV Cook Memorial Trophy and HE Lane Memorial Trophy. The latter went to Alan Ryder, a member of the JW Hunt Cup committee, for services to local football, that has seen him involved at grassroots level as a player and secretary with clubs including Northicote Old Boys, Red Dragons, Wolverhampton Transport, Wednesfield Town and Marstons for more than45 years.

The RV Cook Trophy went to Wolverhampton & Bilston AC's Colin Thompson. He joined the club in 1999 as a runner and moved onto the committee a year later, becoming chairman in in 2004.

He instigated numerous initiatives that have helped the club grow. One of the highlights was when W&B were voted England Athletics Development Club of the Year in 2010.

Councillor Evans and Volunteer of the Year Jacky Silvester from Tettenhall

The Disabled Athlete of the Year, Richard Hammond from Tettenhall

Councillor Steve Evans presents Coach of the Year to Steve Peat

Sport

Sporting heroes are recognised at awards

Page 35

Heathens to race on with Trophy spot

CRADLEY Heathens will race for the National Trophy next year.

The nomadic club have entered the competition for the first time to ensure the world famous name survives into a ninth season since their relaunch. All home meetings will be raced at Monmore Green after making the decision not to take Birmingham up on the offer to race at Perry Barr. They will face rivals Birmingham, Buxton, Coventry and Stoke at home and away.

Manager Will Pottinger has already pledged his commitment to stay in charge of the team and will be looking to use a settled squad of riders. But it means Heathens won't be in the National League.

Co-promoter Gary Patchett said: "When we brought the Heathens back to the track in 2010 the longevity of the club was dependent on our success or failure to find a site suitable to develop into a permanent base.

"There is no prospect of that happening anytime soon.

"Whilst we thank David Mason for extending an invitation for the club to use Perry Barr again it is not viable for us to do so.

"We made a pledge to our supporters to do everything in our power to keep the club on track next season and this was the only option open to us.

"We thank the other member clubs of the NL for allowing us the opportunity to keep the name of this great club alive."

Rowe trots home in festive race to win turkey product

AFTER a blank weekend last week, with the majority of races cancelled due to the weather, athletes from Dudley Kingswinford Running Club were back in action – however this was on a very limited basis.

A few hardy individuals had trained throughout the week, making alternative arrangements relying on gym-based treadmills or sticking to well-gritted roads and bus routes. But many decided to write the week off.

By the time the weather had relented a little many were just looking to get some mileage in rather than pull on the vest and compete.

The only representative racing took part in Wolverhampton and Bilston AC's Turkey Trot. Originally advertised as a five-mile race starting and finishing on the track at Aldersley Stadium this year's renewal was curtailed somewhat due to ice and reduced to a fraction under the advertised distance.

DK's sole runner, Tim Rowe, braved the conditions to finish in 85th place in 32.23 in a field of 198 hardy souls and, like every other finisher, was presented with a "turkey product" as a reward for staying upright.

Rugby club is tackling knife crime

Farah Ahmed, Opening Boundaries, Robin Edwards, SRFC chairman, Peter Wheeler, RFU junior vice-president, Nick Perry, SRFC president

STOURBRIDGE Rugby Club has joined a campaign to raise awareness of knife crime and how it can be tackled.

The club is working in partnership with Opening Boundaries to organise a community charity event next May.

They are teaming up with West Midlands Police who have given their backing to the 'I support Tackling Knife Crime' campaign which was launched in November to coincide with the club's first game on its new artificial grass pitch.

The tournament aims to be fully inclusive and will raise money for Birmingham Children's Hospital. Miranda Williams, public fundraising manager at Birmingham Children's Hospital charity, said: "We are incredibly grateful to Opening Boundaries and Stourbridge Rugby Club. The money will make a huge difference to the lives of our brave children and their families."

Register via info@opening boundaries.org before January 31.

On the pitch, Stourbridge ended 2017 with a 39-25 win over Macclesfield last weekend.

IT'S A DODD-LE FOR GLASSBOYS

Leamington 0 Stourbridge 1

MATT Dodd fired Stourbridge into the last 32 of the FA Trophy on his 100th appearance for the club.

The Glassboys travel to Essex to face Billericay Town, of the Isthmian League Premier, in the second round on January 13.

On Saturday, Dodd downed former club Leamington by scrambling in off the post and via keeper Tony Breeden's glove after Kyle Perry had nodded an Aaron Forde corner towards goal three minutes after half-time.

Breeden denied Forde a second from Luke Shearer's centre just before the hour-mark, blocking with his legs, but the Brakes offered little hope of a leveller.

It meant Leamington became Stour's third National North scalp in cup competitions this season, but boss Gary Hackett stressed the importance of repeat performances in the league.

Occasion

"I was delighted to see Matt nick a goal after missing him for two or three weeks," said Hackett. "I hadn't been aware of it being his 100th game and it was a great way to mark the occasion.

"Leamington were every bit as tough as we expected them to be and made it scrappy but we deserved the win.

"We were very disciplined and kept a clean sheet. Everyone deserves a lot of credit because it was a strong all-round performance.

"It is great to be in the next round. This was the third National League club we have beaten this season.

"Now we need to get back to addressing our league form because that has been erratic."

Stourbridge scooped £6,000 in prize money for winning and have moved within four stages of a Wembley final.

Glassboys are at home to Whitby Town on Saturday and go to Stafford Rangers on Boxing Day

Stars toe the oche for hospice

'Super Chin' Daryl Gurney is among the players at the fundraising darts event in Dudley

FOUR international players will toe the oche at a charity darts event in Dudley in the new year.

Daryl Gurney, Steve Beaton, Jamie Caven and Alan Norris will lock horns in the second annual Tungsten Hold 'Em event at Parkes Hall Social Club on February 24. Dutchman Jelle Klaasen won last year, with more than £4,000 raised for the Mary Stevens Hospice.

The evening is to be hosted by legendary PDC caller, Kirk 'The Kirkulator' Bevins, with all the players assisted by walk-on ladies Daniella and Charlotte. A limited number of standing tickets are still left. Crowd members can win the chance to play against some of the stars in a fundraising raffle. Standard standing tickets are £20, with VIP seated tickets at £30 per person. Call Tony Waterfield on 07950 213169 or Geoff Goodyear on 07727 679384.

Organiser Sean Marshall said: "We were delighted when the first Tungsten Hold 'Em sold out in March, maximising the amount we were able to donate to the Mary Stevens Hospice.

"We're delighted to continue our relationship with the social club in bringing this event back to Dudley."

Pair facing midweek darts action

TIPTON duo Scott Baker and Jamie Hughes will sit out the opening weekend of the 2018 BDO World Championship after being assigned midweek slots for their ties.

The Black Country throwers can't toe the oche together until, at least, the semi-finals at Lakeside.

Baker makes his worlds debut and takes on Belgium's Andy Beatens, the current Belgium Masters and England Masters champion, in a first-to-three sets tie.

The match will open the evening session on Monday, January 8 and will be broadcast on BT Sport.

The winner will take on either former BDO winner Scott Mitchell or Lithuania's Darius Labanauskas in the best-of-five second round clash.

Third seed Hughes, a two-time worlds semi-finalist, enters the fray for the evening's line-up the following day in the last game of the day's schedule.

He will play either Canada's David Cameron or German open qualifier Michael Unterbuchner, who will slug it out, in front of Channel 4 viewers, in the first clash on Tuesday afternoon.

Should he prevail, Hughes will likely go up against Martin Phillips, who must first beat either New Zealand's Craig Caldwell or English debutant Daniel Day.

Down the line, 'Yozza' could face a potential last four rematch with reigning world champion Glen Durrant, who beat him at the same stage last time.

Check out club's Christmas blitz

ALL three of Stourbridge Chess Club's matches were cancelled because of the bad weather. It would have been too dangerous to travel to away matches at night on the icy roads.

This will add to the club's fixture congestion in 2018. However, the club will be holding a Christmas blitz tournament on Wednesday December 27, at Stourbridge Institute, in Market Street open to all members and prospective members. Registration is at 7.15pm for a 7.30 start.

To join the club or play in the blitz contact Dave Scriven on 01384 423642 or visit www.stourbridgechess.f9.co.uk

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